BRENHILDA AGELASTES & SYLVAN

COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS

BRENHILDA AGELASTES & SYLVAN

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THE WORKS OF

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Count Robert of Paris

Part II.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE Count of Paris and his lady were that night lodged in the Imperial Palace of Blacquernal. Their apartments were contiguous, but the communication between them was cut off for the night by the mutual door being locked and barred. They marvelled somewhat at this precaution. The observance, however, of the festival of the church was pleaded as an admissible and not unnatural excuse for this extraordinary circumstance. Neither the Count nor his lady entertained, it may be believed, the slightest personal fear for anything which could happen to them. Their attendants, Marcian and Agatha, having assisted their master and mistress in the performance of their usual offices, left them, in order to seek the places of repose assigned to them among persons of their degree.

The preceding day had been one of excitation, and of much bustle and interest; perhaps, also, the wine, sacred to the imperial lips, of which Count Robert had taken a single, indeed, but a deep draught, was more potent than the delicate and high-flavoured juice of the Gascogne grape, to which he was accustomed; at any rate, it seemed to him that, from the time he felt that he had slept, daylight ought to have been broad in his chamber when he awaked, and yet it was still darkness almost palpable. Somewhat surprised, he gazed eagerly around, but could discern nothing, except two balls of red light which shone from among the darkness with a self-emitted brilliancy, like the eyes of a wild animal while it glares upon its prey. The Count started from bed to put on his armour, a necessary precaution if what he saw should really be a wild creature and at liberty; but the instant he stirred a

deep growl was uttered, such as the Count had never heard, but which might be compared to the sound of a thousand monsters at once; and, as the symphony, was heard the clash of iron chains, and the springing of a monstrous creature towards the bedside, which appeared, however, to be withheld by some fastening from attaining the end of its bound. The roars which it uttered now ran thick on each other. They were most tremendous, and must have been heard throughout the whole palace. The creature seemed to gather itself many yards nearer to the bed than by its glaring eyeballs it appeared at first to be stationed, and how much nearer, or what degree of motion, might place him within the monster's reach, the Count was totally uncertain. Its breathing was even heard, and Count Robert thought he felt the heat of its respiration, while his defenceless limbs might not be two yards distant from the fangs which he heard grinding against each other, and the claws which tore up fragments of wood from the oaken floor. The Count of Paris was one of the bravest men who lived in a time when bravery was the universal property of all who claimed a drop of noble blood, and the knight was a descendant of Charlemagne. He was, however, a man, and therefore cannot be said to have endured unappalled a sense of danger so unexpected and so extraordinary. But his was not a sudden alarm or panic, it was a calm sense of extreme peril, qualified by a resolution to exert his faculties to the uttermost, to save his life if it were possible. He withdrew himself within the bed, no longer a place of rest, being thus a few feet farther from the two glaring eyeballs which remained so closely fixed upon him, that, in spite of his courage, nature painfully suggested the bitter imagination of his limbs being mangled, torn, and churned with their life-blood, in the jaws of some monstrous beast of prey. One saving thought alone presented itself—this might be a trial, an experiment of the philosopher Agelastes, or of the Emperor his master, for the purpose of proving the courage of which the Christians vaunted so highly, and punishing the thoughtless insult which the Count had been unadvised enough to put upon the Emperor the preceding day.

"Well is it said," he reflected in his agony, "beard not the lion in his den! Perhaps even now some base slave deliberates whether I have yet tasted enough of the preliminary agonies of death, and whether he shall yet slip the chain which keeps the savage from doing his work. But come death when it will, it shall never be said that Count Robert was heard to receive it with prayers for compassion, or with cries of pain or terror." He turned his face to the wall, and waited, with a strong mental exertion, the death which he conceived to be fast approaching.

His first feelings had been unavoidably of a selfish nature. The danger was too instant, and of a description too horrible, to admit of any which involved a more comprehensive view of his calamity; and other reflections of a more distant kind were at first swallowed up in the all-engrossing thought of immediate death. But as his ideas

became clearer, the safety of his Countess rushed upon his mind—what might she now be suffering! and, while he was subjected to a trial so extraordinary, for what were her weaker frame and female courage reserved? Was she still within a few yards of him, as when he lay down the last night? or had the barbarians, who had devised for him a scene so cruel, availed themselves of his and his lady's incautious confidence, to inflict upon her some villainy of the same kind, or even yet more perfidious? Did she sleep or wake, or could she sleep within the close hearing of that horrible cry, which shook all around? He resolved to utter her name, warning her, if possible, to be upon her guard, and to answer without venturing rashly into the apartment which contained a guest so horribly perilous.

He uttered, therefore, his wife's name, but in trembling accents, as if he had been afraid of the savage beast overhearing him.

"Brenhilda! Brenhilda!—there is danger—awake, and speak to me, but do not arise." There was no answer.—"What am I become," he said to himself, "that I call upon Brenhilda of Aspramonte, like a child on its sleeping nurse, and all because there is a wild cat in the same room with me? Shame on thee, Count of Paris! Let thy arms be rent and thy spurs be hacked from thy heels!—What ho!" he cried aloud, but still with a tremulous voice, "Brenhilda, we are beset, the foe are upon us! Answer me, but stir not."

A deep growl from the monster which garrisoned his apartment was the only answer. The sound seemed to say, "Thou hast no hope!" and it ran to the knight's bosom as the genuine expression of despair.

"Perhaps, however, I am still too cold in making my misery known. What, ho! my love! Brenhilda!"

A voice, hollow and disconsolate as that which might have served an inhabitant of the grave, answered as if from a distance. "What disconsolate wretch art thou, who expectest that the living can answer thee from the habitations of the dead?"

"I am a Christian man, a free noble of the kingdom of France," answered the Count. "Yesterday the captain of five hundred men, the bravest in France—the bravest, that is, who breathe mortal air—and I am here without a glimpse of light to direct me how to avoid the corner in which lies a wild tiger-cat, prompt to spring upon and to devour me."

"Thou art an example," replied the voice, "and wilt not long be the last, of the changes of fortune. I, who am now suffering in my third year, was that mighty Ursel, who rivalled Alexius Comnenus for the crown of Greece, was betrayed by my confederates, and being deprived of that eyesight which is the chief blessing of humanity, I inhabit these vaults, no distant neighbour of the wild animals by whom they are sometimes occupied, and whose cries of joy I hear when unfortunate victims like thyself are delivered up to their fury."

"Didst thou not then hear," said Count Robert, in return, "a

warlike guest and his bride conducted hither last night, with sounds as it might seem of bridal music?—Oh, Brenhilda! hast thou, so young—so beautiful—been so treacherously done to death by means so unutterably horrible!"

"Think not," answered Ursel, as the voice had called its owner, "that the Greeks pamper their wild beasts on such lordly fare. For their enemies, which term includes not only all that are really such, but all those whom they fear or hate, they have dungeons whose locks never revolve; hot instruments of steel, to sear the eyeballs in the head; lions and tigers, when it pleases them to make a speedy end of their captives—but these are only for the male prisoners. While for the women—if they be young and beautiful, the princes of the land have places in their bed and bower; nor are they employed, like the captives of Agamemnon's host, to draw water from an Argive spring, but are admired and adored by those whom fate has made the lords of their destiny."

"Such shall never be the doom of Brenhilda!" exclaimed Count Robert; "her husband still lives to assist her, and should he die she knows well how to follow him without leaving a blot in the epitaph of either."

The captive did not immediately reply, and a short pause ensued, which was broken by Ursel's voice. "Stranger," he said, "what noise is that I hear?"

"Nay, I hear nothing," said Count Robert.

"But I do," said Ursel. "The cruel deprivation of my eyesight renders my other senses more acute."

"Disquiet not thyself about the matter, fellow-prisoner," answered the Count, "but wait the event in silence."

Suddenly a light arose in the apartment, lurid, red, and smoky. The knight had bethought him of a flint and match which he usually carried about him, and with as little noise as possible had lighted the torch by the bedside; this he instantly applied to the curtains of the bed, which being of thin muslin were in a moment in flames. The knight sprang, at the same instant, from his bed. The tiger, for such it was, terrified at the flame, leaped backwards as far as his chain would permit, heedless of anything save this new object of terror. Count Robert upon this seized on a massive wooden stool, which was the only offensive weapon on which he could lay his hand, and, marking at those eyes which now reflected the blaze of fire, and which had recently seemed so appalling, he discharged against them this fragment of ponderous oak, with a force which less resembled human strength than the impetus with which an engine hurls a stone. He had employed his instant of time so well, and his aim was so true, that the missile went right to the mark and with incredible force. The skull of the tiger, which might be, perhaps, somewhat exaggerated if described as being of the very largest size, was fractured by the blow,

and with the assistance of his dagger, which had fortunately been left with him, the French Count despatched the monster, and had the satisfaction to see him grin his last, and roll, in the agony of death, those eyes which were lately so formidable.

Looking around him he discovered, by the light of the fire which he had raised, that the apartment in which he now lay was different from that in which he had gone to bed overnight; nor could there be a stronger contrast between the furniture of both than the flickering, half-burnt remains of the thin muslin curtains, and the strong, bare,

"Count Robert upon this seized on a massive wooden stool" (p. 186).

dungeon-looking walls of the room itself, or the very serviceable wooden stool, of which he had made such good use.

The knight had no leisure to form conclusions upon such a subject. He hastily extinguished the fire, which had, indeed, nothing that it could lay hold of, and proceeded, by the light of the flambeau, to examine the apartment and its means of entrance. It is scarce necessary to say that he saw no communication with the room of Brenhilda, which convinced him that they had been separated the evening before under pretence of devotional scruples, in order to accomplish

some villainous design upon one or both of them. His own part of the night's adventure we have already seen; and success so far, over so formidable a danger, gave him a trembling hope that Brenhilda, by her own worth and valour, would be able to defend herself against all attacks of fraud or force, until he could find his way to her rescue. "I should have paid more regard," he said, "to Bohemond's caution last night, who, I think, intimated to me as plainly as if he had spoken it in direct terms, that that same cup of wine was a drugged potion. But then, fie upon him for an avaricious hound! how was it possible I should think he suspected any such thing, when he spoke not out like a man, but, for sheer coldness of heart, or base self-interest, suffered me to run the risk of being poisoned by the wily despot?"

Here he heard a voice from the same quarter as before. "Ho, there! Ho, stranger! Do you live, or have you been murdered? What means this stifling smell of smoke? For God's sake, answer him who can receive no information from eyes closed, alas, for ever!"

"I am at liberty," said the Count, "and the monster destined to devour me has groaned its last. I would, my friend Ursel, since such is thy name, thou hadst the advantage of thine eyes, to have borne witness to yonder combat; it had been worth thy while, though thou shouldst have lost them a minute afterwards, and it would have greatly advantaged whoever shall have the task of compiling my history."

While he gave a thought to that vanity which strongly ruled him, he lost no time in seeking some mode of escape from the dungeon, for by that means only might he hope to recover his Countess. At last he found an entrance in the wall, but it was strongly locked and bolted. "I have found the passage," he called out; "and its direction is the same in which thy voice is heard—but how shall I undo the door?"

"I'll teach thee that secret," said Ursel. "I would I could as easily unlock each bolt that withholds us from the open air; but, as for thy seclusion within the dungeon, heave up the door by main strength, and thou shalt lift the locks to a place where, pushing then the door from thee, the fastenings will find a grooved passage in the wall, and the door itself will open. Would that I could indeed see thee, not only because, being a gallant man, thou must be a goodly sight, but also because I should thereby know that I was not caverned in darkness for ever."

While he spoke thus the Count made a bundle of his armour, from which he missed nothing except his sword, Tranchefer, and then proceeded to try what efforts he could make, according to the blind man's instructions, to open the door of his prison-house. Pushing in a direct line was, he soon found, attended with no effect; but when he applied his gigantic strength and raised the door as high as it would go, he had the satisfaction to find that the bolts yielded, though reluctantly. A space had been cut so as to allow them to move out of the socket into which they had been forced; and without the turn of a

key, but by a powerful thrust forwards, a small passage was left open. The knight entered, bearing his armour in his hand.

"I hear thee," said Ursel, "O stranger! and am aware thou art come into my place of captivity. For three years have I been employed in cutting these grooves, corresponding to the sockets which hold these iron bolts, and preserving the knowledge of the secret from the prison-keepers. Twenty such bolts, perhaps, must be sawn through ere my steps shall approach the upper air. What prospect is there that I shall have strength of mind sufficient to continue the task? Yet, credit me, noble stranger, I rejoice in having been thus far aiding to thy deliverance; for if Heaven blesses not, in any farther degree, our aspirations after freedom, we may still be a comfort to each other, while tyranny permits our mutual life."

Count Robert looked around and shuddered that a human being should talk of anything approaching to comfort connected with his residence in what seemed a living tomb. Ursel's dungeon was not above twelve feet square, vaulted in the roof, and strongly built in the walls by stones which the chisel had morticed closely together. A bed, a coarse footstool, like that which Robert had just launched at the head of the tiger, and a table of equally massive materials, were its only articles of furniture. On a long stone, above the bed, were these few, but terrible words: "Zedekias Ursel, imprisoned here on the Ides of March, A.D.——. Died and interred on the spot——" A blank was left for filling up the period. The figure of the captive could hardly be discerned amid the wildness of his dress and dishabille. The hair of his head, uncut and uncombed, descended in elf-locks, and mingled with a beard of extravagant length.

"Look on me," said the captive, "and rejoice that thou canst yet see the wretched condition to which iron-hearted tyranny can reduce a fellow-creature, both in mortal existence and in future hope."

"Was it thou," said Count Robert, whose blood ran cold in his veins, "that hadst the heart to spend thy time in sawing through the blocks of stone by which these bolts are secured?"

"Alas!" said Ursel, "what could a blind man do? Busy I must be, if I would preserve my senses. Great as the labour was, it was to me the task of three years; nor can you wonder that I should have devoted to it my whole time, when I had no other means of occupying it. Perhaps, and most likely, my dungeon does not admit the distinction of day and night; but a distant cathedral clock told me how hour after hour fled away, and found me expending them in rubbing one stone against another. But when the door gave way, I found I had only cut an access into a prison more strong than that which held me. I rejoice, nevertheless, since it has brought us together, given thee an entrance to my dungeon and me a companion in my misery."

"Think better than that," said Count Robert, "think of liberty

—think of revenge! I cannot believe such unjust treachery will end successfully, else needs must I say the heavens are less just than priests tell us of. How art thou supplied with food in this dungeon of thine?"

"A warder," said Ursel, "and who, I think, understands not the Greek language—at least he never either answers or addresses me—brings a loaf and a pitcher of water, enough to supply my miserable life till two days are past. I must, therefore, pray that you will retire for a space into the next prison, so that the warder may have no means of knowing that we can hold correspondence together."

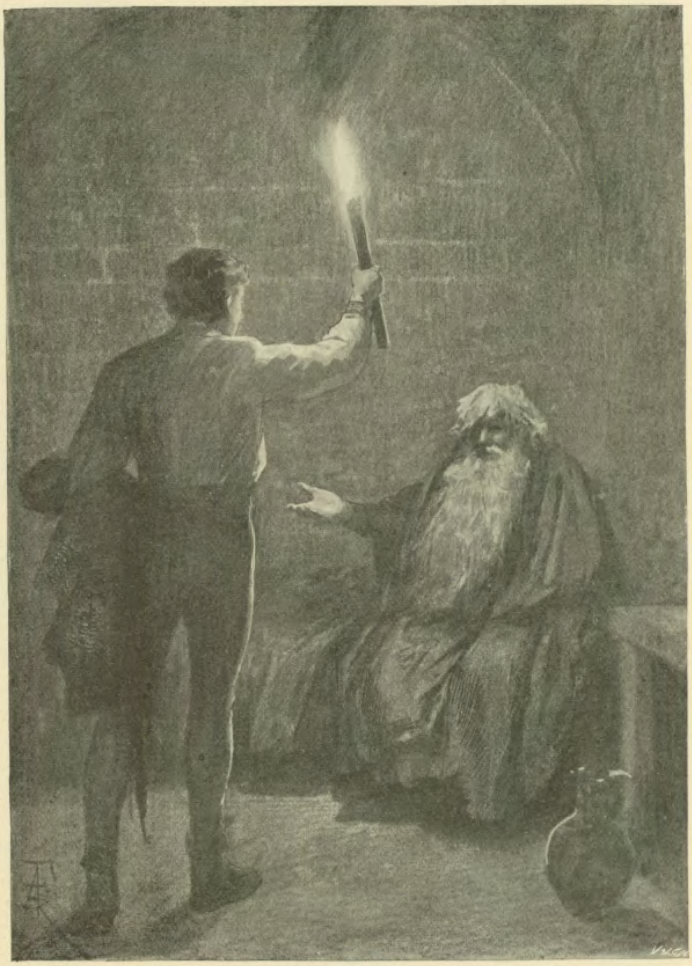
"I see not," said Count Robert, "by what access the barbarian, if he is one, can enter my dungeon without passing through yours; but no matter, I will retire into the inner or outer room, whichever it happens to be, and be thou then well aware that the warder will have some one to grapple with ere he leaves his prison-work to-day. Meanwhile, think thyself dumb as thou art blind, and be assured that the offer of freedom itself would not induce me to desert the cause of a companion in adversity."

"Alas!" said the old man, "I listen to thy promises as I should to those of the morning gale, which tells me that the sun is about to arise, although I know that I at least shall never behold it. Thou art one of those wild and undespairing knights, whom for so many years the west of Europe hath sent forth to attempt impossibilities, and from thee, therefore, I can only hope for such a fabric of relief as an idle boy would blow out of soap bubbles."

"Think better of us, old man," said Count Robert, retiring; "at least let me die with my blood warm, and believing it possible for me to be once more united to my beloved Brenhilda."

So saying, he retired into his own cell and replaced the door, so that the operations of Ursel, which indeed were only such as three years' solitude could have achieved, should escape observation when again visited by the warder. "It is ill luck," said he, when once more within his own prison—for that in which the tiger had been secured he instinctively concluded to be destined for him—"It is ill luck that I had not found a young and able fellow-captive, instead of one decrepit by imprisonment, blind, and broken down past exertion. But God's will be done! I will not leave behind me the poor wretch whom I have found in such a condition, though he is perfectly unable to assist me in accomplishing my escape, and is rather more likely to retard it. Meantime, before we put out the torch, let us see if, by close examination, we can discover any door in the wall save that to the blind man's dungeon. If not, I much suspect that my descent has been made through the roof. That cup of wine—that Muse, as they called it—had a taste more like medicine than merry companions' pledge."

He began accordingly a strict survey of the walls, which he resolved



"'Look on me,' said the captive" (p. 189).

to conclude by extinguishing the torch, that he might take the person who should enter his dungeon darkling and by surprise. For a similar

reason he dragged into the darkest corner the carcass of the tiger, and covered it with the remains of the bed-clothes, swearing, at the same time, that a half tiger should be his crest in future, if he had the fortune, which his bold heart would not suffer him to doubt, of getting through the present danger. "But," he added, "if these necromantic vassals of hell shall raise the devil upon me, what shall I do then? And so great is the chance, that methinks I would fain dispense with extinguishing the flambeau. Yet it is childish for one dubbed in the chapel of Our Lady of the Broken Lances to make much difference between a light room and a dark one. Let them come, as many fiends as the cell can hold, and we shall see if we receive them not as becomes a Christian knight; and surely, Our Lady, to whom I was ever a true votary, will hold it an acceptable sacrifice that I tore myself from my Brenhilda, even for a single moment, in honour of her advent, and thus led the way for our woful separation. Fiends! I defy ye in the body as in the spirit, and I retain the remains of this flambeau until some more convenient opportunity." He dashed it against the wall as he spoke, and then quietly sat down in a corner to watch what should next happen.

Thought after thought chased each other through his mind. His confidence in his wife's fidelity, and his trust in her uncommon strength and activity, were the greatest comforts which he had; nor could her danger present itself to him in any shape so terrible, but that he found consolation in these reflections: "She is pure," he said, "as the dew of heaven, and heaven will not abandon its own."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Strange ape of man! who loathes thee while he scorns thee;
Half a reproach to us and half a jest.
What fancies can be ours ere we have pleasure
In viewing our own form, our pride and passions,
Reflected in a shape grotesque as thine!"

Anonymous.

COUNT ROBERT OF PARIS having ensconced himself behind the ruins of the bed, so that he could not well be observed, unless a strong light was at once flung upon the place of his retreat, waited with anxiety how and in what manner the warder of the dungeon, charged with the task of bringing food to the prisoners, should make himself visible; nor was it long ere symptoms of his approach began to be heard and observed.

A light was partially seen, as from a trap-door opening in the roof, and a voice was heard to utter these words in Anglo-Saxon, "Leap, sirrah; come, no delay; leap, my good Sylvan, show your honour's activity." A strange, chuckling, hoarse voice, in a language totally unintelligible to Count Robert, was heard to respond, as if disputing the orders which were received.

"What, sir," said his companion, "you must contest the point, must you? Nay, if thou art so lazy, I must give your honour a ladder, and perhaps a kick to hasten your journey." Something then, of very great size, in the form of a human being, jumped down from the trap-door, though the height might be above fourteen feet. This figure was gigantic, being upwards of seven feet high. In its left hand it held a torch, and in its right a skein of fine silk, which

unwinding itself as it descended, remained unbroken, though it was easy to conceive it could not have afforded a creature so large any support in his descent from the roof. He alighted with perfect safety and activity upon his feet, and, as if rebounding from the floor, he sprang upwards again, so as almost to touch the roof. In this last gambaud the torch which he bore was extinguished; but this extraordinary warder whirled it round his head with infinite velocity, so that it again ignited. The bearer, who appeared to intend the accomplishment of this object, endeavoured to satisfy himself that it was really attained, by approaching, as if cautiously, its left hand to the flame of the torch. This practical experiment seemed attended with consequences which the creature had not expected, for it howled with pain, shaking the burnt hand, and chattering as if bemoaning itself.

"Take heed there, Sylvanus!" said the same voice in Anglo-Saxon, and in a tone of rebuke. "Ho, there! mind thy duty, Sylvan! Carry food to the blind man, and stand not there to play thyself, lest I trust thee not again alone on such an errand!"

The creature—for it would have been rash to have termed it a man—turning its eye upwards to the place from whence the voice came, answered with a dreadful grin and shaking of its fist, yet presently began to undo a parcel, and rummage in the pockets of a sort of jerkin and pantaloons which it wore, seeking, it appeared, a bunch of keys, which at length it produced, while it took from the pocket a loaf of bread. Heating the stone of the wall, it affixed the torch to it by a piece of wax, and then cautiously looked out for the entrance to the old man's dungeon, which it opened with a key selected from the bunch. Within the passage it seemed to look for and discover the handle of a pump, at which it filled a pitcher that it bore, and bringing back the fragments of the former loaf, and remains of the pitcher of water, it ate a little, as if it were in sport, and very soon making a frightful grimace, flung the fragments away. The Count of Paris, in the meanwhile, watched anxiously the proceedings of this unknown animal. His first thought was, that the creature, whose limbs were so much larger than humanity, whose grimaces were so frightful, and whose activity seemed supernatural, could be no other than the Devil himself, or some of his imps, whose situation and office in those gloomy regions seemed by no means hard to conjecture. The human voice, however, which he had heard, was less that of a necromancer conjuring a fiend than that of a person giving commands to a wild animal, over whom he had, by training, obtained a great superiority.

"A shame on it," said the Count, "if I suffer a common jack-anapes,—for such I take this devil-seeming beast to be, although twice as large as any of its fellows whom I have ever seen,—to throw an obstacle in the way of my obtaining daylight and freedom! Let us but watch,

and the chance is that we make that furry gentleman our guide to the upper regions.

Meantime the creature, which rummaged about everywhere, at length discovered the body of the tiger, touched it, stirred it, with many strange motions, and seemed to lament and wonder at its death. At once it seemed struck with the idea that some one must have slain it, and Count Robert had the mortification to see it once more select the key, and spring towards the door of Ursel's prison with such alacrity, that had its intention been to strangle him, it would have accomplished its purpose before the interference of Count Robert could have prevented its revenge taking place. Apparently, however, it reflected, that for reasons which seemed satisfactory, the death of the tiger could not be caused by the unfortunate Ursel, but had been accomplished by some one concealed within the outer prison.

Slowly grumbling, therefore, and chattering to itself, and peeping anxiously into every corner, the tremendous creature, so like, yet so very unlike to the human form, came stealing along the walls, moving whatever he thought could seclude a man from his observation. Its extended legs and arms were protruded forward with great strides, and its sharp eyes, on the watch to discover the object of its search, kept prying, with the assistance of the torch, into every corner.

Considering the vicinity of Alexius's collection of animals, the reader, by this time, can have little doubt that the creature in question, whose appearance seemed to the Count of Paris so very problematical, was a specimen of that gigantic species of ape—if it is not indeed some animal more nearly allied to ourselves—to which, I believe, naturalists have given the name of the Ourang Outang. This creature differs from the rest of its fraternity in being comparatively more docile and serviceable; and though possessing the power of imitation which is common to the whole race, yet making use of it less in mere mockery, than in the desire of improvement and instruction perfectly unknown to his brethren. The aptitude which it possesses of acquiring information is surprisingly great, and probably, if placed in a favourable situation, it might admit of being domesticated in a considerable degree; but such advantages the ardour of scientific curiosity has never afforded this creature. The last we have heard of was seen, we believe, in the Island of Sumatra—it was of great size and strength, and upwards of seven feet high. It died defending desperately its innocent life against a party of Europeans, who, we cannot help thinking, might have better employed the superiority which their knowledge gave them over the poor native of the forest. It was probably this creature, seldom seen, but when once seen never forgotten, which occasioned the ancient belief in the god Pan, with his sylvans and satyrs. Nay, but for the gift of speech, which we cannot suppose any of the family to have attained, we should have believed the satyr seen by St. Anthony in the desert to have belonged to this tribe.

We can, therefore, the more easily credit the annals which attest that the collection of natural history belonging to Alexius Comnenus preserved an animal of this kind, which had been domesticated and reclaimed to a surprising extent, and showed a degree of intelligence never perhaps to be attained in any other case. These explanations being premised, we return to the thread of our story.

The animal advanced with long, noiseless steps; its shadow on the wall, when it held the torch so as to make it visible to the Frank, forming another fiend-resembling mimicry of its own large figure and extravagant-looking members. Count Robert remained in his lurking-hole, in no hurry to begin a strife of which it was impossible to foretell the end. In the meantime, the man of the woods came nigh, and every step by which he approached, caused the Count's heart to vibrate almost audibly, at the idea of meeting danger of a nature so strange and new. At length the creature approached the bed—his hideous eyes were fixed on those of the Count; and, as much surprised at seeing him as Robert was at the meeting, he skipped about fifteen paces backwards at one spring, with a cry of instinctive terror, and then advanced on tiptoe, holding his torch as far forward as he could, between him and the object of his fears, as if to examine him at the safest possible distance. Count Robert caught up a fragment of the bedstead, large enough to form a sort of club, with which he menaced the native of the wilds.

Apparently this poor creature's education, like education of most kinds, had not been acquired without blows, of which the recollection was as fresh as that of the lessons which they enforced. Sir Robert of Paris was a man at once to discover and to avail himself of the advantage obtained by finding that he possessed a degree of ascendency over his enemy which he had not suspected. He erected his warlike figure, assumed a step as if triumphant in the lists, and advanced threatening his enemy with his club, as he would have menaced his antagonist with the redoubtable Tranchefer. The man of the woods, on the other hand, obviously gave way, and converted his cautious advance into a retreat no less cautious. Yet apparently the creature had not renounced some plan of resistance; he chattered in an angry and hostile tone, held out his torch in opposition, and seemed about to strike the crusader with it. Count Robert, however, determined to take his opponent at advantage, while his fears influenced him, and for this purpose resolved, if possible, to deprive him of his natural superiority in strength and agility, which his singular form showed he could not but possess over the human species. A master of his weapon, therefore, the Count menaced his savage antagonist with a stroke on the right side of his head, but suddenly averting the blow, struck him with his whole force on the left temple, and in an instant was kneeling above him, when, drawing his dagger, he was about to deprive him of life.

The Ourang Outang, ignorant of the nature of this new weapon with which he was threatened, attempted at one and the same moment

to rise from the ground, overthrow his antagonist, and wrench the dagger from his grasp. In the first attempt he would probably have succeeded; and as it was, he gained his knees, and seemed likely to prevail in the struggle, when he became sensible that the knight, drawing his poniard sharply through his grasp, had cut his paw severely, and seeing him aim the trenchant weapon at his throat, became probably aware that his enemy had his life at command. He suffered himself to be borne backwards without further resistance, with a deep wailing and melancholy cry, having in it something human, which excited compassion. He covered his eyes with the unwounded hand, as if he would have hid from his own sight the death which seemed approaching him.

Count Robert, notwithstanding his military frenzy, was, in ordinary matters, a calm-tempered and mild man, and particularly benevolent to the lower classes of creation. The thought rushed through his mind, "Why take from this unfortunate monster the breath which is in its nostrils, after which it cannot know another existence? And then, may it not be some prince or knight changed to this grotesque shape, that it may help to guard these vaults, and the wonderful adventures that attach to them? Should I not, then, be guilty of a crime by slaying him, when he has rendered himself, rescue or no rescue, which he has done as completely as his transformed figure permits; and if he be actually a bestial creature, may he not have some touch of gratitude? I have heard the minstrels sing the lay of Androcles and the Lion. I will be on my guard with him."

So saying, he rose from above the man of the woods, and permitted him also to arise. The creature seemed sensible of the clemency, for he muttered, in a low and supplicating tone, which seemed at once to crave for mercy and to return thanks for what he had already experienced. He wept too, as he saw the blood dropping from his wound, and with an anxious countenance, which had more of the human now that it was composed into an expression of pain and melancholy, seemed to await in terror the doom of a being more powerful than himself.

The pocket which the knight wore under his armour, capable of containing but few things, had, however, some vulnerary balsam, for which its owner had often occasion, a little lint, and a small roll of linen; these the knight took out and motioned to the animal to hold forth his wounded hand. The man of the woods obeyed with hesitation and reluctance, and Count Robert applied the balsam and the dressings, acquainting his patient, at the same time, in a severe tone of voice, that perhaps he did wrong in putting to his use a balsam compounded for the service of the noblest knights; but that, if he saw the least sign of his making an ungrateful use of the benefit he had conferred, he would bury the dagger, of which he had felt the efficacy, to the very handle in his body.

The sylvan looked fixedly upon Count Robert, almost as if he understood the language used to him, and, making one of its native murmurs, it stooped to the earth, kissed the feet of the knight, and, embracing his knees, seemed to swear to him eternal gratitude and fidelity. Accordingly, when the Count retired to the bed and assumed his armour, to await the re-opening of the trap-door, the animal sat down by his side, directing its eyes in the line with his, and seemed quietly to wait till the door should open.

After waiting about an hour, a slight noise was heard in the upper chamber, and the wild man plucked the Frank by the cloak, as if to call his attention to what was about to happen. The same voice which had before spoken, was, after a whistle or two, heard to call, "Sylvan, Sylvan! where loiterest thou? Come instantly, or, by the rood, thou shalt abye thy sloth!"

The poor monster, as Trinculo might have called him, seemed perfectly aware of the meaning of this threat, and showed his sense of it by pressing close to the side of Count Robert, making at the same time a kind of whining, entreating, it would seem, the knight's protection. Forgetting the great improbability there was, even in his own opinion, that the creature could understand him, Count Robert said, "Why, my friend, thou hast already learned the principal court prayer of this country, by which men entreat permission to speak and live. Fear nothing, poor creature—I am thy protector."

"Sylvan! what, ho!" said the voice again; "whom hast thou got for a companion?—some of the fiends, or ghosts of murdered men, who they say are frequent in these dungeons? or dost thou converse with the old blind rebel Grecian?—or, finally, is it true that men say of thee, that thou canst talk intelligibly when thou wilt, and only gibberest and chatterest for fear thou art sent to work? Come, thou lazy rascal! thou shalt have the advantage of the ladder to ascend by, though thou needst it no more than a daw to ascend the steeple of the Cathedral of St. Sophia.* Come along then," he said, putting a ladder down the trap-door, "and put me not to the trouble of descending to fetch thee, else, by St. Swithin, it shall be the worse for thee. Come along, therefore, like a good fellow, and for once I shall spare the whip."

The animal, apparently, was moved by this rhetoric, for, with a doleful look, which Count Robert saw by means of the nearly extinguished torch, he seemed to bid him farewell, and to creep away towards the ladder with the same excellent good-will wherewith a condemned criminal performs the like evolution. But no sooner did the Count look angry, and shake the formidable dagger, than the intelligent animal seemed at once to take his resolution, and clenching his hands firmly together in the fashion of one who has made up his mind, he returned from the ladder's foot and drew up behind Count Robert,—with the air,

* Now the chief mosque of the Ottoman capital.

however, of a deserter, who feels himself but little at home when called into the field against his ancient commander.

"The Varangian's arm was seized with vigour" (p. 200).

In a short time the warder's patience was exhausted, and despairing of the sylvan's voluntary return, he resolved to descend in quest of him.

Down the ladder he came, a bundle of keys in one hand, the other assisting his descent, and a sort of dark lantern, whose bottom was so fashioned that he could wear it upon his head like a hat. He had scarce stepped on the floor when he was surrounded by the nervous arms of the Count of Paris. At first the warder's idea was that he was seized by the recusant sylvan.

"How now, villain!" he said; "let me go, or thou shalt die the death."

"Thou diest thyself," said the Count, who, between the surprise and his own skill in wrestling, felt fully his advantage in the struggle.

"Treason! treason!" cried the warder, hearing by the voice that a stranger had mingled in the contest; "help, ho! above there! help, Hereward—Varangian!—Anglo-Saxon, or whatever accursed name thou callest thyself!"

While he spoke thus, the irresistible grasp of Count Robert seized his throat and choked his utterance. They fell heavily, the gaoler undermost, upon the floor of the dungeon, and Robert of Paris, the necessity of whose case excused the action, plunged his dagger in the throat of the unfortunate. Just as he did so a noise of armour was heard, and, rattling down the ladder, our acquaintance Hereward stood on the floor of the dungeon. The light, which had rolled from the head of the warder, continued to show him streaming with blood and in the death-grasp of a stranger. Hereward hesitated not to fly to his assistance, and, seizing upon the Count of Paris at the same advantage which that knight had gained over his own adversary a moment before, held him forcibly down with his face to the earth.

Count Robert was one of the strongest men of that military age; but then so was the Varangian; and save that the latter had obtained a decided advantage by having his antagonist beneath him, it could not certainly have been conjectured which way the combat was to go.

"Yield! as your own jargon goes, rescue or no rescue," said the Varangian, "or die on the point of my dagger!"

"A French Count never yields," answered Robert, who began to conjecture with what sort of person he was engaged, "above all to a vagabond slave like thee!" With this he made an effort to rise, so sudden, so strong, so powerful, that he had almost freed himself from the Varangian's grasp, had not Hereward, by a violent exertion of his great strength, preserved the advantage he had gained and raised his poniard to end the strife for ever; but a loud chuckling laugh of an unearthly sound was at this instant heard. The Varangian's extended arm was seized with vigour, while a rough arm, embracing his throat, turned him over on his back and gave the French Count an opportunity of springing up.

"Death to thee, wretch!" said the Varangian, scarce knowing whom he threatened; but the man of the woods apparently had an awful recollection of the prowess of human beings. He fled, therefore,

swiftly up the ladder, and left Hereward and his deliverer to fight it out with what success chance might determine between them.

The circumstances seemed to argue a desperate combat; both were tall, strong, and courageous, both had defensive armour, and the fatal and desperate poniard was their only offensive weapon. They paused facing each other, and examined eagerly into their respective means of defence before hazarding a blow, which, if it missed, its attaint would certainly be fatally requited. During this deadly pause a gleam shone from the trap-door above, as the wild and alarmed visage of the man of the woods was seen peering down by the light of a newly kindled torch which he held as low into the dungeon as he well could.

"Fight bravely, comrade," said Count Robert of Paris, "for we no longer battle in private; this respectable person having chosen to constitute himself judge of the field."

Hazardous as his situation was, the Varangian looked up, and was so struck with the wild and terrified expression which the creature had assumed, and the strife between curiosity and terror which its grotesque features exhibited, that he could not help bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Sylvan is among those," said Hereward, "who would rather hold the candle to a dance so formidable than join in it himself."

"Is there then," said Count Robert, "any absolute necessity that thou and I perform this dance at all?"

"None but our own pleasure," answered Hereward, "for I suspect there is not between us any legitimate cause of quarrel demanding to be fought out in such a place and before such a spectator. Thou art, if I mistake not, the bold Frank who was yesternight imprisoned in this place with a tiger, chained within no distant spring of his bed?"

"I am," answered the Count.

"And where is the animal who was opposed to thee?"

"He lies yonder," answered the Count, "never again to be the object of more terror than the deer whom he may have preyed on in his day." He pointed to the body of the tiger, which Hereward examined by the light of the dark lantern already mentioned.

"And this, then, was thy handiwork?" said the wondering Anglo-Saxon.

"Sooth to say it was," answered the Count with indifference.

"And thou hast slain my comrade of this strange watch?" said the Varangian.

"Mortally wounded him at the least," said Count Robert.

"With your patience, I will be beholden to you for a moment's truce, while I examine his wound," said Hereward.

"Assuredly," answered the Count; "blighted be the arm which strikes a foul blow at an open antagonist!"

Without demanding further security, the Varangian quitted his posture of defence and precaution, and set himself, by the assistance of the dark lantern, to examine the wound of the first warder who

appeared on the field, who seemed, by his Roman military dress, to be a soldier of the bands called Immortals. He found him in the death agony, but still able to speak.

"So, Varangian, thou art come at last—and it is to thy sloth or treachery that I am to impute my fate? Nay, answer me not! The stranger struck me over the collar-bone—had we lived long together, or met often, I had done the like by thee, to wipe out the memory of certain transactions at the Golden Gate. I know the use of the knife too well to doubt the effect of a blow aimed over the collar-bone by so strong a hand—I feel it coming. The Immortal, so called, becomes now, if priests say true, an Immortal indeed, and Sebastes of Mytilene's bow is broken ere his quiver is half emptied."

The robber Greek sank back in Hereward's arms, and closed his life with a groan, which was the last sound he uttered. The Varangian laid the body at length on the dungeon floor.

"This is a perplexed matter"—he said; "I am certainly not called upon to put to death a brave man, although my national enemy, because he hath killed a miscreant who was privately meditating my own murder. Neither is this a place or a light by which to fight as becomes the champions of two nations. Let that quarrel be still for the present.—How say you then, noble sir, if we adjourn the present dispute till we effect your deliverance from the dungeons of the Blacquernal, and your restoration to your own friends and followers? If a poor Varangian should be of service to you in this matter, would you, when it was settled, refuse to meet him in fair fight, with your national weapons or his own?"

"If," said Count Robert, "whether friend or enemy, thou wilt extend thy assistance to my wife, who is also imprisoned somewhere in this inhospitable palace, be assured, that whatever be thy rank, whatever be thy country, whatever be thy condition, Robert of Paris will, at thy choice, proffer thee his right hand in friendship, or raise it against thee in fair and manly battle—a strife not of hatred, but of honour and esteem; and this I vow by the soul of Charlemagne, my ancestor, and by the shrine of my patroness, Our Lady of the Broken Lances."

"Enough said," replied Hereward. "I am as much bound to the assistance of your Lady Countess, being a poor exile, as if I were the first in the ranks of chivalry; for if anything can make the cause of worth and bravery yet more obligatory, it must be its being united with that of a helpless and suffering female."

"I ought," said Count Robert, "to be here silent, without loading thy generosity with farther requests; yet thou art a man, whom, if fortune has not smiled at thy birth by ordaining thee to be born within the ranks of noblesse and knighthood, yet Providence hath done thee more justice by giving thee a more gallant heart than is always possessed, I fear, by those who are inwoven in the gayest wreath of chivalry.

There lingers here in these dungeons—for I cannot say he lives—a blind old man, to whom for three years everything beyond his prison has been a universal blot. His food is bread and water, his intercourse limited to the conversation of a sullen warder, and if death can ever come as a deliverer, it must be to this dark old man. What sayst thou? Shall he, so unutterably miserable, not profit by perhaps the only opportunity of freedom that may ever occur to him?"

"By St. Dunstan," answered the Varangian, "thou keepest over truly the oath thou hast taken as a redresser of wrongs! Thine own case is well-nigh desperate and thou art willing to make it utterly so by uniting with it that of every unhappy person whom fate throws in thy way!"

"'Proceed in quest of the Countess Brenhilda.'"

"The more of human misery we attempt to relieve," said Robert of Paris, "the more we shall carry with us the blessing of our merciful saints, and Our Lady of the Broken Lances, who views with so much pain every species of human suffering or misfortune, save that which occurs within the enclosure of the lists. But come, valiant Anglo-Saxon, resolve me on my request as speedily as thou canst. There is something in thy face of candour as well as sense, and it is with no small confidence that I desire to see us set forth in quest of my beloved Countess, who, when her deliverance is once achieved, will be a powerful aid to us in recovering that of others."

"So be it, then," said the Varangian; "we will proceed in quest of the Countess Brenhilda; and if, on recovering her, we find ourselves strong enough to procure the freedom of the dark old man, my cowardice, or want of compassion, shall never stop the attempt."

CHAPTER XVII.

"'Tis strange that, in the dark sulphureous mine,
Where wild ambition piles its ripening stores
Of slumbering thunder, Love will interpose
His tiny torch, and cause the stern explosion
To burst, when the deviser's least aware."

Anonymous.

ABOUT noon of the same day, Agelastes met with Achilles Tatius, the commander of the Varangian guard, in those ruins of the Egyptian temple in which we formerly mentioned Hereward having had an interview with the philosopher. They met, as it seemed, in a very different humour. Tatius was gloomy, melancholy, and downcast; while the philosopher maintained the calm indifference which procured for him, and in some sort deserved, the title of the Elephant. "Thou blenchest, Achilles Tatius," said the philosopher, "now that thou hast frankly opposed thyself to all the dangers which stood between thee and greatness. Thou art like the idle boy who turned the mill-stream upon the machine, and that done, instead of making a proper use of it, was terrified at seeing it in motion."

"Thou dost me wrong, Agelastes," answered the Acolyte, "foul wrong; I am but like the mariner, who, although determined upon his voyage, yet cannot forbear a sorrowing glance at the shore, before he parts with it, it may be for ever."

"It may have been right to think of this, but pardon me, valiant Tatius, when I tell you the account should have been made up before; and the grandson of Alguric the Hun ought to have computed chances and consequences ere he stretched his hand to his master's diadem."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake," said Tatius, looking round; "that,

thou knowest, is a secret between our two selves; for if Nicephorus, the Cæsar, should learn it, where were we and our conspiracy?"

"Our bodies on the gibbet, probably," answered Agelastes, "and our souls divorced from them, and in the way of discovering the secrets which thou hast hitherto taken upon trust."

"Well," said Achilles, "and should not the consciousness of the possibility of this fate render us cautious?"

"Cautious *men* if you will," answered Agelastes, "but not timid children."

"Stone walls can hear," said the Follower, lowering his voice. "Dionysius the tyrant, I have read, had an Ear which conveyed to him the secrets spoken within his state-prison at Syracuse."

"And that Ear is still stationary at Syracuse," said the philosopher. "Tell me, my most simple friend, art thou afraid it has been transported hither in one night, as the Latins believe of Our Lady's house of Loretto?"

"No," answered Achilles, "but in an affair so important too much caution cannot be used."

"Well, thou most cautious of candidates for empire, and most cold of military leaders, know that the Cæsar, deeming, I think, that there is no chance of the empire falling to any one but himself, hath taken in his head to consider his succession to Alexius as a matter of course, whenever the election takes place. In consequence, as matters of course are usually matters of indifference, he has left all thoughts of securing his interest upon this material occasion to thee and to me, while the foolish voluptuary hath himself run mad—for what think you? Something between man and woman—female in her lineaments, her limbs, and a part at least of her garments; but, so help me St. George, most masculine in the rest of her attire, in her propensities, and in her exercises."

"The Amazonian wife, thou meanest," said Achilles, "of that iron-handed Frank, who dashed to pieces last night the golden lion of Solomon with a blow of his fist? By St. George, the least which can come of such an amour is broken bones."

"That," said Agelastes, "is not quite so improbable as that Dionysius's Ear should fly hither from Syracuse in a single night; but he is presumptuous in respect of the influence which his supposed good looks have gained him among the Grecian dames."

"He was too presumptuous, I suppose," said Achilles Tatius, "to make a proper allowance for his situation as Cæsar, and the prospect of his being Emperor."

"Meantime," said Agelastes, "I have promised him an interview with his Bradamante, who may perhaps reward his tender epithets of *Zoe kai psyche*,* by divorcing his amorous soul from his unrivalled person."

* "Life and Soul."

"Meantime," said the Follower, "thou obtainest, I conclude, such orders and warrants as the Cæsar can give for the furtherance of our plot?"

"Assuredly," said Agelastes, "it is an opportunity not to be lost. This love fit, or mad fit, has blinded him; and without exciting too much attention to the progress of the plot, we can thus in safety conduct matters our own way, without causing malevolent remarks; and though I am conscious that, in doing so, I act somewhat at variance with my age and character, yet the end being to convert a worthy Follower into an Imperial Leader, I shame me not in procuring that interview with the lady, of which the Cæsar, as they term him, is so desirous. What progress, meanwhile, hast thou made with the Varangians, who are, in respect of execution, the very arm of our design?"

"Scarce so good as I could wish," said Achilles Tatius; "yet I have made sure of some two or three score of those whom I found most accessible; nor have I any doubt, that, when the Cæsar is set aside, their cry will be for Achilles Tatius."

"And what of the gallant who assisted at our prelections?" said Agelastes; "your Edward, as Alexius termed him?"

"I have made no impression upon him," said the Follower; "and I am sorry for it, for he is one whom his comrades think well of, and would gladly follow. Meantime I have placed him as an additional sentinel upon the iron-witted Count of Paris, whom, both having an inveterate love of battle, he is very likely to put to death; and if it is afterwards challenged by the crusaders as a cause of war, it is only delivering up the Varangian, whose personal hatred will needs be represented as having occasioned the catastrophe. All this being prepared beforehand, how and when shall we deal with the Emperor?"

"For that," said Agelastes, "we must consult the Cæsar, who, although his expected happiness of to-day is not more certain than the state preferment that he expects to-morrow, and although his ideas are much more anxiously fixed upon his success with this said Countess than his succession to the empire, will, nevertheless, expect to be treated as the head of the enterprise for accelerating the latter. But, to speak my opinion, valiant Tatius, to-morrow will be the last day that Alexius shall hold the reins of empire."

"Let me know for certain," said the Follower, "as soon as thou canst, that I may warn our brethren, who are to have in readiness the insurgent citizens, and those of the Immortals who are combined with us, in the neighbourhood of the court, and in readiness to act. And, above all, that I may disperse upon distant guards such Varangians as I cannot trust."

"Rely upon me," said Agelastes, "for the most accurate information and instructions, so soon as I have seen Nicephorus Briennius. One word permit me to ask—In what manner is the wife of the Cæsar to be disposed of?"

"Somewhere," said the Follower, "where I can never be compelled to hear more of her history. Were it not for that nightly pest of her lectures, I could be good-natured enough to take care of her destiny myself, and teach her the difference betwixt a real emperor and this Briennius, who thinks so much of himself." So saying, they separated;

"Agelastes looked after his companion with a scornful laugh."

the Follower elated in look and manner considerably above what he had been when they met.

Agelastes looked after his companion with a scornful laugh. "There," he said, "goes a fool, whose lack of sense prevents his eyes from being dazzled by the torch which cannot fail to consume him. A half-bred, half-acting, half-thinking, half-daring caitiff, whose poorest thoughts—and those which deserve that name must be poor indeed—are not the produce of his own understanding. He expects to circumvent

the fiery, haughty, and proud Nicephorus Briennius! If he does so, it will not be by his own policy, and still less by his valour. Nor shall Anna Comnena, the soul of wit and genius, be chained to such an unimaginative log as yonder half barbarian. No—she shall have a husband of pure Grecian extraction, and well stored with that learning which was studied when Rome was great and Greece illustrious. Nor will it be the least charm of the imperial throne, that it is partaken by a partner whose personal studies have taught her to esteem and value those of the Emperor." He took a step or two with conscious elevation, and then, as conscience-checked, he added, in a suppressed voice, "But then, if Anna were destined for Empress, it follows of course that Alexius must die—no consent could be trusted to.—And what then?—the death of an ordinary man is indifferent, when it plants on the throne a philosopher and a historian; and at what time were the possessors of the empire curious to inquire when or by whose agency their predecessors died?—Diogenes! Ho, Diogenes!" The slave did not immediately come, so that Agelastes, wrapped in the anticipation of his greatness, had time to add a few more words—"Tush—I must reckon with Heaven, say the priests, for many things, so I will throw this also into the account. The death of the Emperor may be twenty ways achieved without my having the blame of it. The blood which we have shed may spot our hand, if closely regarded, but it shall scarce stain our forehead." Diogenes here entered—"Has the Frank Lady been removed?" said the philosopher.

The slave signified his assent.

"How did she bear her removal?"

"As authorised by your lordship, indifferently well. She had resented her separation from her husband and her being detained in the palace, and committed some violence upon the slaves of the Household, several of whom were said to be slain, although we perhaps ought only to read sorely frightened. She recognised me at once, and when I told her that I came to offer her a day's retirement in your own lodgings, until it should be in your power to achieve the liberation of her husband, she at once consented, and I deposited her in the secret Cytherean garden-house."

"Admirably done, my faithful Diogenes," said the philosopher; "thou art like the genii who attended on the Eastern talismans; I have but to intimate my will to thee, and it is accomplished."

Diogenes bowed deeply, and withdrew.

"Yet remember, slave!" said Agelastes, speaking to himself; "there is danger in knowing too much—and should my character ever become questioned, too many of my secrets are in the power of Diogenes."

At this moment a blow thrice repeated, and struck upon one of the images without, which had been so framed as to return a tingling sound, and in so far deserved the praise of being vocal, interrupted his soliloquy.

"There knocks," said he, "one of our allies; who can it be that comes so late?" He touched the figure of Isis with his staff, and the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius entered in the full Grecian habit, and that graceful dress anxiously arranged to the best advantage. "Let me hope, my lord," said Agelastes, receiving the Cæsar with an apparently grave and reserved face, "your Highness comes to tell me that your sentiments are changed on reflection, and that whatever you had to confer about with this Frankish lady, may be at least deferred until the principal part of our conspiracy has been successfully executed."

"Philosopher," answered the Cæsar, "no. My resolution, once taken, is not the sport of circumstances. Believe me, that I have not finished so many labours without being ready to undertake others. The favour of Venus is the reward of the labours of Mars, nor would I think it worth while to worship the god armipotent with the toil and risk attending his service, unless I had previously attained some decided proofs that I was wreathed with the myrtle, intimating the favour of his beautiful mistress."

The Images.

"I beg pardon for my boldness," said Agelastes; "but has your Imperial Highness reflected that you were wagering, with the wildest rashness, an empire, including thine own life, mine, and all who are joined with us in a hardy scheme? And against what were they waged? Against the very precarious favour of a woman, who is altogether divided betwixt fiend and female, and in either capacity is most likely to be fatal to our present scheme, either by her good will, or by the offence which she may take. If she prove such as you wish, she will desire to keep her lover by her side, and to spare him the danger of engaging in a perilous conspiracy; and if she remains, as the world believe her, constant to her husband, and to the sentiments she vowed to him at the altar, you may guess what cause of offence you are likely to give, by urging a suit which she has already received so very ill."

"Pshaw, old man! Thou turnest a dotard, and in the great knowledge thou possessest of other things, hast forgotten the knowledge best worth knowing—that of the beautiful part of the creation. Think

of the impression likely to be made by a gallant neither ignoble in situation, nor unacceptable in presence, upon a lady who must fear the consequences of refusal! Come, Agelastes, let me have no more of thy croaking, auguring bad fortune like the raven from the blasted oak on the left hand; but declaim, as well thou canst, how faint heart never won fair lady, and how those best deserve empire who can wreathe the myrtles of Venus with the laurels of Mars. Come, man, undo me the secret entrance which combines these magical ruins with groves that are fashioned rather like those of Cytheros or Naxos."

"It must be as you will!" said the philosopher, with a deep and somewhat affected sigh.

"Here, Diogenes!" called aloud the Cæsar; "when thou art summoned, mischief is not far distant. Come, undo the secret entrance. Mischief, my trusty negro, is not so distant but she will answer the first clatter of the stones."

"'Hold, friend Diogenes,' said the Cæsar."

The negro looked at his master, who returned him a glance acquiescing in the Cæsar's proposal. Diogenes then went to a part of the ruined wall which was covered by some climbing shrubs, all of which he carefully removed. This showed a little postern door, closed irregularly, and filled up, from the threshold to the top, with large square stones, all of which the slave took out and piled aside, as if for the purpose of replacing them. "I leave thee," said Agelastes to the negro, "to guard this door, and let no one enter, except he has the sign, upon the peril of thy life. It were dangerous it should be left open at this period of the day."

The obsequious Diogenes put his hand to his sabre and to his head, as if to signify the usual promise of fidelity or death, by which those of his condition generally expressed their answer to their master's commands. Diogenes then lighted a small lantern, and pulling out a key, opened an inner door of wood, and prepared to step forward.

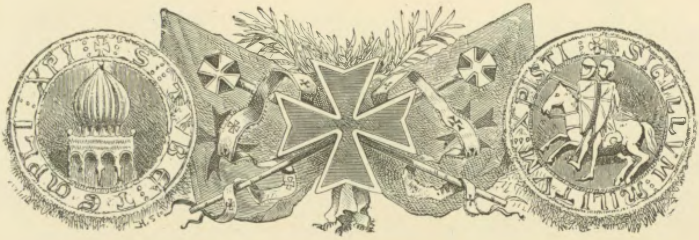
"Hold, friend Diogenes," said the Cæsar; "thou wantest not thy lantern to discern an honest man, whom, if thou didst seek, I must needs say thou hast come to the wrong place to find one. Nail thou up these

creeping shrubs before the entrance of the place, and abide thou there, as already directed, till our return, to parry the curiosity of any who may be attracted by the sight of the private passage."

The black slave drew back as he gave the lamp to the Cæsar, and Agelastes followed the light through a long, but narrow, arched passage, well supplied with air from space to space, and not neglected in the inside to the degree which its exterior would have implied.

"I will not enter with you into the gardens," said Agelastes, "or to the bower of Cytherea, where I am too old to be a worshipper. Thou thyself, I think, Imperial Cæsar, art well aware of the road, having travelled it divers times; and, if I mistake not, for the fairest reasons."

"The more thanks," said the Cæsar, "are due to mine excellent friend Agelastes, who forgets his own age to accommodate the youth of his friends."



CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now return to the dungeon of the Blacquernal, where circumstances had formed at least a temporary union between the stout Varangian and Count Robert of Paris, who had a stronger resemblance to each other in their dispositions than probably either of them would have been willing to admit. The virtues of the Varangian were all of that natural and unrefined kind which nature herself dictates to a gallant man, to whom a total want of fear, and the most prompt alacrity to meet danger, had been attributes of a life-long standing. The Count, on the other hand, had all that bravery, generosity, and love of adventure which was possessed by the rude soldier, with the virtues, partly real, partly fantastic, which those of his rank and country acquired from the spirit of chivalry. The one might be compared to the diamond as it came from the mine, before it had yet received the advantages of cutting and setting; the other was the ornamented gem, which, cut into facets and richly set, had lost perhaps a little of its original substance, yet still, at the same time, to the eye of an inspector, had something more showy and splendid than when it was, according to the phrase of lapidaries, *en brut*. In the one case, the value was more artificial; in the other, it was the more natural and real of the two. Chance, therefore, had made a temporary alliance between two men, the foundation of whose characters bore such strong resemblance to each other, that they were only separated by a course of education, which had left rigid prejudices on both sides, and which prejudices were not unlikely to run counter to each other. The Varangian commenced his conversation with the Count in a tone of familiarity, approaching nearer to rudeness than the speaker was aware of, and much of which, though most innocently intended by Hereward, might

be taken amiss by his new brother in arms. The most offensive part of his deportment, however, was a blunt, bold disregard to the title of those whom he addressed, adhering thereby to the manners of the Saxons, from whom he drew his descent, and which was likely to be at least unpleasing to the Franks as well as Normans, who had already received and become very tenacious of the privileges of the feudal system, the mummery of heraldry, and the warlike claims assumed by knights, as belonging only to their own order.

Hereward was apt, it must be owned, to think too little of these distinctions; while he had at least a sufficient tendency to think enough of the power and wealth of the Greek Empire which he served,—of the dignity inherent in Alexius Comnenus, and which he was also disposed to grant to the Grecian officers, who, under the Emperor, commanded his own corps, and particularly to Achilles Tatius. This man Hereward knew to be a coward, and half suspected to be a villain. Still, however, the Follower was always the direct channel through which the imperial graces were conferred on the Varangians in general, as well as upon Hereward himself; and he had always the policy to represent such favours as being more or less indirectly the consequence of his own intercession. He was supposed vigorously to espouse the quarrel of the Varangians, in all the disputes between them and the other corps; he was liberal and open-handed; gave every soldier his due; and, bating the trifling circumstance of valour, which was not particularly his forte, it would have been difficult for these strangers to have demanded a leader more to their wishes. Besides this, our friend Hereward was admitted by him into his society; attended him, as we have seen, upon secret expeditions; and shared, therefore, deeply in what may be termed by an expressive, though vulgar, phrase, the sneaking kindness entertained for this new Achilles by the greater part of his myrmidons.

Their attachment might be explained, perhaps, as a liking to their commander, as strong as could well exist with a marvellous lack of honour and esteem. The scheme, therefore, formed by Hereward to effect the deliverance of the Count of Paris, comprehended as much faith to the Emperor, and his representative, the Acolyte or Follower, as was consistent with rendering justice to the injured Frank.

In furtherance of this plan, he conducted Count Robert from the subterranean vaults of the Blacquernal, of the intricacies of which he was master, having been repeatedly, of late, stationed sentinel there, for the purpose of acquiring that knowledge of which Tatius promised himself the advantage in the ensuing conspiracy. When they were in the open air, and at some distance from the gloomy towers of the Palace, he bluntly asked the Count of Paris whether he knew Agelastes the Philosopher. The other answered in the negative.

"Look you now, Sir Knight, you hurt yourself in attempting to

impose upon me," said Hereward. "You must know him; for I saw you dined with him yesterday."

"Oh! with that learned old man?" said the Count. "I know nothing of him worth owning or disguising to thee or any one. A wily person he is, half herald and half minstrel."

"Half procurer and whole knave," subjoined the Varangian. "With the mask of apparent good-humour, he conceals his pandering to the vices of others; with the specious jargon of philosophy, he has argued himself out of religious belief and moral principle; and, with the appearance of the most devoted loyalty, he will, if he is not checked in time, either argue his too confiding master out of life and empire, or, if he fails in this, reason his simple associates into death and misery."

"And do you know all this," said Count Robert, "and permit this man to go unimpeached?"

"Oh, content you, sir," replied the Varangian; "I cannot yet form any plot which Agelastes may not countermine; but the time will come—nay, it is already approaching—when the Emperor's attention shall be irresistibly turned to the conduct of this man, and then let the philosopher sit fast, or by St. Dunstan the barbarian overthrows him! I would only fain, methinks, save from his clutches a foolish friend, who has listened to his delusions."

"But what have I to do," said the Count, "with this man, or with his plots?"

"Much," said Hereward, "although you know it not. The main supporter of this plot is no other than the Cæsar, who ought to be the most faithful of men; but ever since Alexius has named a Sebastocrator, an officer that is higher in rank, and nearer to the throne, than the Cæsar himself, so long has Nicephorus Briennius been displeased and dissatisfied, though for what length of time he has joined the schemes of the astucious Agelastes, it is more difficult to say. This I know, that for many months he has fed liberally, as his riches enable him to do, the vices and prodigality of the Cæsar. He has encouraged him to show disrespect to his wife, although the Emperor's daughter; has put ill-will between him and the royal family. And if Briennius bears no longer the fame of a rational man, and the renown of a good leader, he is deprived of both by following the advice of this artful sycophant."

"And what is all this to me?" said the Frank. "Agelastes may be a true man, or a time-serving slave; his master, Alexius Comnenus, is not so much allied to me or mine, that I should meddle in the intrigues of his court."

"You may be mistaken in that," said the blunt Varangian; "if these intrigues involve the happiness and virtue——"

"Death of a thousand martyrs!" said the Frank, "doth paltry intrigues and quarrels of slaves involve a single thought of suspicion

of the noble Countess of Paris? The oaths of thy whole generation were ineffectual to prove but that one of her hairs had changed its colour to silver!"

"Well imagined, gallant knight," said the Anglo-Saxon; "thou art a husband fitted for the atmosphere of Constantinople, which calls for little vigilance and a strong belief. Thou wilt find many followers and fellows in this court of ours."

"Hark thee, friend," replied the Frank, "let us have no more words, nor walk farther together than just to the most solitary nook of this bewildered city, and let us there set to that work which we left even now unfinished."

"If thou wert a duke, Sir Count," replied the Varangian, "thou couldst not invite to a combat one who is more ready for it. Yet consider the odds on which we fight. If I fall, my moan is soon made; but will my death set thy wife at liberty if she is under restraint, or restore her honour if it is tarnished?—Will it do anything more than remove from the world the only person who is willing to give thee aid, at his own risk and danger, and who hopes to unite thee to thy wife, and replace thee at the head of thy forces?"

"I was wrong," said the Count of Paris; "I was entirely wrong; but beware, my good friend, how thou couplest the name of Brenhilda of Aspramonte with the word of dishonour, and tell me, instead of this irritating discourse, whither go we now."

"To the Cytherean gardens of Agelastes, from which we are not far distant," said the Anglo-Saxon; "yet he hath a nearer way to it than that by which we now travel, else I should be at a loss to account for the short space in which he could exchange the charms of his garden for the gloomy ruins of the Temple of Isis, and the imperial palace of the Blacquernal."

"And wherefore, and how long," said Count Robert, "dost thou conclude that my Countess is detained in these gardens?"

"Ever since yesterday," replied Hereward. "When both I, and several of my companions, at my request, kept close watch upon the Cæsar and your lady, we did plainly perceive passages of fiery admiration on his part, and anger, as it seemed, on hers, which Agelastes, being Nicephorus's friend, was likely, as usual, to bring to an end, by a separation of you both from the army of the crusaders, that your wife, like many a matron before, might have the pleasure of taking up her residence in the gardens of that worthy sage; while you, my lord, might take up your own permanently in the castle of Blacquernal."

"Villain! why didst thou not apprise me of this yesterday?"

"A likely thing," said Hereward, "that I should feel myself at liberty to leave the ranks, and make such a communication to a man, whom, far from a friend, I then considered in the light of a personal enemy! Methinks that, instead of such language as this,

you should be thankful that so many chance circumstances have at length brought me to befriend and assist you."

Count Robert felt the truth of what was said, though at the same time his fiery temper longed to avenge itself, according to its wont, upon the party which was nearest at hand.

But now they arrived at what the citizens of Constantinople called the Philosopher's Gardens. Here Hereward hoped to obtain entrance, for he had gained a knowledge of some part, at least, of the private signals of Achilles and Agelastes since he had been introduced to the last at the ruins of the Temple of Isis. They had not indeed admitted him to their entire secret; yet, confident in his connection with the Follower, they had no hesitation in communicating to him snatches of knowledge, such as, committed to a man of shrewd natural sense like the Anglo-Saxon, could scarce fail, in time and by degrees, to make him master of the whole. Count Robert and his companion stood before an arched door, the only opening in a high wall, and the Anglo-Saxon was about to knock, when, as if the idea had suddenly struck him,—

"What if the wretch Diogenes opens the gate? We must kill him ere he can fly back and betray us. Well, it is a matter of necessity, and the villain has deserved his death by a hundred horrid crimes."

"Kill him, then, thyself," retorted Count Robert; "he is nearer thy degree, and assuredly I will not defile the name of Charlemagne with the blood of a black slave."

"Nay, God-a-mercy!" answered the Anglo-Saxon, "but you must bestir yourself in the action, supposing there come rescue and that I be overborne by odds."

"Such odds," said the knight, "will render the action more like a *mêlée*, or general battle; and assure yourself, I will not be slack when I may, with my honour, be active."

"I doubt it not," said the Varangian; "but the distinction seems a strange one, that, before permitting a man to defend himself or annoy his enemy, requires him to demand the pedigree of his ancestor."

"Fear you not, sir," said Count Robert. "The strict rule of chivalry indeed bears what I tell thee, but when the question is, Fight or not? there is great allowance to be made for a decision in the affirmative."

"Let me give, then, the exorciser's rap," replied Hereward, "and see what fiend will appear."

So saying, he knocked in a particular manner, and the door opened inwards. A dwarfish negress stood in the gap; her white hair contrasted singularly with her dark complexion, and with the broad laughing look peculiar to these slaves. She had something in her physiognomy which, severely construed, might argue malice and a delight in human misery.

"Is Agelastes——" said the Varangian; but he had not completed the sentence, when she answered him, by pointing down a shadowed walk.

The Anglo-Saxon and Frank turned in that direction, when the hag rather muttered than said distinctly, "You are one of the initiated, Varangian; take heed whom you take with you, when you may hardly, peradventure, be welcomed even going alone."

Hereward made a sign that he understood her, and they were instantly out of her sight. The path winded beautifully through the shades of an Eastern garden, where clumps of flowers, and labyrinths of flowering shrubs, and the tall boughs of the forest trees, rendered even the breath of noon cool and acceptable.

"Here he observed him apply, first his eye, and then his ear, to one of the casements" (p. 218).

"Here we must use our utmost caution," said Hereward, speaking in a low tone of voice; "for here it is most likely the deer that we seek has found its refuge. Better allow me to pass before, since you are too deeply agitated to possess the coolness necessary for a scout. Keep concealed beneath yon oak, and let no vain scruples of honour deter you from creeping beneath the underwood, or beneath the earth itself, if you should hear a footfall. If the lovers have agreed, Agelastes, it is probable, walks his round, to prevent intrusion."

"Death and furies! it cannot be!" exclaimed the fiery Frank.—

"Lady of the Broken Lances, take thy votary's life, ere thou torment him with this agony!"

He saw, however, the necessity of keeping a strong force upon himself, and permitted, without further remonstrance, the Varangian to pursue his way, looking, however, earnestly after him. By advancing forward a little, he could observe Hereward draw near to a pavilion which arose at no great distance from the place where they had parted. Here he observed him apply, first his eye, and then his ear, to one of the easements, which were in a great measure grown over, and excluded from the light, by various flowering shrubs. He almost thought he saw a grave interest take place in the countenance of the Varangian, and he longed to have his share of the information which he had doubtless obtained.

He crept, therefore, with noiseless steps, through the same labyrinth of foliage which had covered the approaches of Hereward; and so silent were his movements, that he touched the Anglo-Saxon, in order to make him aware of his presence, before he observed his approach.

Hereward, not aware at first by whom he was approached, turned on the intruder with a countenance like a burning coal. Seeing, however, that it was the Frank, he shrugged his shoulders, as if pitying the impatience which could not be kept under prudent restraint, and drawing himself back, allowed the Count the privilege of a peeping place through plinths of the casement, which could not be discerned by the sharpest eye from the inner side. The sombre character of the light which penetrated into this abode of pleasure, was suited to that species of thought to which a temple of Cytherea was supposed to be dedicated. Portraits and groups of statuary were also to be seen, in the taste of those which they had beheld at the Kiosk of the waterfall, yet something more free in the ideas which they conveyed than were to be found at their first resting-place. Shortly after, the door of the pavilion opened, and the Countess entered, followed by her attendant Agatha. The lady threw herself on a couch as she came in, while her attendant, who was a young and very handsome woman, kept herself modestly in the background, so much so as hardly to be distinguished.

"What dost thou think," said the Countess, "of so suspicious a friend as Agelastes? so gallant an enemy as the Cæsar, as he is called?"

"What should I think," returned the damsel, "except that what the old man calls friendship is hatred, and what the Cæsar terms a patriotic love for his country, which will not permit him to set its enemies at liberty, is in fact too strong an affection for his fair captive?"

"For such an affection," said the Countess, "he shall have the same requital as if it were indeed the hostility of which he would give it the colour.—My true and noble lord! hadst thou an idea of the calamities to which they have subjected me, how soon wouldst thou break through every restraint to hasten to my relief!"

"Art thou a man," said Count Robert to his companion, "and canst thou advise me to remain still and hear this?"

"I am one man," said the Anglo-Saxon; "you, sir, are another; but all our arithmetic will not make us more than two; and in this place, it is probable that a whistle from the Cæsar, or a scream from Agelastes, would bring a thousand to match us, if we were as bold as Bevis of Hampton. Stand still and keep quiet. I counsel this, less as respecting my own life, which, by embarking upon a wild-goose chase with so strange a partner, I have shown I put at little value, than for thy safety, and that of the lady thy Countess, who shows herself as virtuous as beautiful."

"I was imposed on at first," said the Lady Brenhilda to her attendant. "Affectation of severe morals, of deep learning, and of rigid rectitude, assumed by this wicked old man, made me believe in part the character which he pretended; but the gloss is rubbed off since he let me see into his alliance with the unworthy Cæsar, and the ugly picture remains in its native loathsomeness. Nevertheless, if I can, by address or subtlety, deceive this arch-deceiver,—as he has taken from me, in a great measure, every other kind of assistance,—I will not refuse that of craft, which he may find perhaps equal to his own."

"Hear you that?" said the Varangian to the Count of Paris. "Do not let your impatience mar the web of your lady's prudence. I will weigh a woman's wit against a man's valour where there is aught to do! Let us not come in with our assistance until time shall show us that it is necessary for her safety and our success."

"Amen," said the Count of Paris; "but hope not, Sir Saxon, that thy prudence shall persuade me to leave this garden without taking full vengeance on that unworthy Cæsar, and the pretended philosopher, if indeed he turns out to have assumed a character——" The Count was here beginning to raise his voice, when the Saxon, without ceremony, placed his hand on his mouth. "Thou takest a liberty," said Count Robert, lowering, however, his tones.

"Ay, truly," said Hereward; "when the house is on fire, I do not stop to ask whether the water which I pour on it be perfumed or no."

This recalled the Frank to a sense of his situation; and if not contented with the Saxon's mode of making an apology, he was at least silenced. A distant noise was now heard. The Countess listened, and changed colour. "Agatha," she said, "we are like champions in the lists, and here comes the adversary. Let us retreat into this side apartment, and so for a while put off an encounter thus alarming." So saying the two females withdrew into a sort of ante-room, which opened from the principal apartment, behind the seat which Brenhilda had occupied.

They had scarcely disappeared when, as the stage direction has it, enter from the other side the Cæsar and Agelastes. They had perhaps heard the last words of Brenhilda, for the Cæsar repeated in a low tone—

"'Militat omnis amans, habet et sua castra Cupido.'

"What, has our fair opponent withdrawn her forces? No matter, it shows she thinks of the warfare, though the enemy be not in sight. Well, thou shalt not have to upbraid me this time, Agelastes, with precipitating my amours, and depriving myself of the pleasure of pursuit. By Heavens, I will be as regular in my progress as if in reality I bore on my shoulders the whole load of years which make the difference between us; for I shrewdly suspect that with thee, old man, it is that envious churl Time that hath plucked the wings of Cupid."

"Say not so, mighty Cæsar," said the old man; "it is the hand of Prudence, which, depriving Cupid's wing of some wild feathers, leaves him still enough to fly with an equal and steady flight."

"Thy flight, however, was less measured, Agelastes, when thou didst collect that armoury—that magazine of Cupid's panoply, out of which thy kindness permitted me but now to arm myself, or rather to repair my accoutrements."

So saying, he glanced his eye over his own person, blazing with gems, and adorned with a chain of gold, bracelets, rings, and other ornaments, which, with a new and splendid habit, assumed since his arrival at these Cytherean gardens, tended to set off his very handsome figure.

"I am glad," said Agelastes, "if you have found among toys, which I now never wear, and seldom made use of even when life was young with me, anything which may set off your natural advantages. Remember only this slight condition, that such of these trifles as have made part of your wearing apparel on this distinguished day, cannot return to a meaner owner, but must of necessity remain the property of that greatness of which they had once formed the ornament."

"I cannot consent to this, my worthy friend," said the Cæsar. "I know thou valuest these jewels only in so far as a philosopher may value them; that is, for nothing save the remembrances which attach to them. This large seal-ring, for instance, was—I have heard you say—the property of Socrates; if so, you cannot view it save with devout thankfulness, that your own philosophy has never been tried with the exercise of a Xantippe. These clasps released, in older times, the lovely bosom of Phryne; and they now belong to one who could do better homage to the beauties they concealed or discovered than could the cynic Diogenes. These buckles, too——"

"I will spare thy ingenuity, good youth," said Agelastes, somewhat nettled; "or rather, noble Cæsar. Keep thy wit—thou wilt have ample occasion for it."

"Fear not me," said the Cæsar. "Let us proceed, since you will, to exercise the gifts which we possess, such as they are, either natural or bequeathed to us by our dear and respected friend. Hah!" he said, the door opening suddenly, and the Countess almost meeting him, "our wishes are here anticipated."

He bowed accordingly with the deepest deference to the Lady Brenhilda, who, having made some alterations to enhance the splendour of her attire, now moved forward from the withdrawing-room into which she had retreated.

"Hail, noble lady," said the Cæsar, "whom I have visited with the intention of apologising for detaining you, in some degree against your will, in those strange regions in which you unexpectedly find yourself."

"Not in some degree," answered the lady, "but entirely contrary to my inclinations, which are, to be with my husband the Count of Paris, and the followers who have taken the cross under his banner."

"Such, doubtless, were your thoughts when you left the land of the West," said Agelastes; "but, fair Countess, have they experienced no change? You have left a shore streaming with human blood when the slightest provocation occurred, and thou hast come to one whose principal maxim is to increase the sum of human happiness by every mode which can be invented. In the West yonder, he or she is respected most who can best exercise their tyrannical strength in making others miserable, while in these more placid realms we reserve our garlands for the ingenious youth, or lovely lady, who can best make happy the person whose affection is fixed upon her."

"But, reverend philosopher," said the Countess, "who labourest so artificially in recommending the yoke of pleasure, know that you contradict every notion which I have been taught from my infancy. In the land where my nurture lay, so far are we from acknowledging your doctrines, that we match not, except like the lion and the lioness, when the male has compelled the female to acknowledge his superior worth and valour. Such is our rule, that a damsel, even of mean degree, would think herself heinously undermatched, if wedded to a gallant whose fame in arms was yet unknown."

"But, noble lady," said the Cæsar, "a dying man may then find room for some faint hope. Were there but a chance that distinction in arms could gain those affections which have been stolen, rather than fairly conferred, how many are there who would willingly enter into the competition where the prize is so fair! What is the enterprise too bold to be undertaken on such a condition! And where is the individual whose heart would not feel that, in baring his sword for the prize, he made vow never to return it to the scabbard without the proud boast, What I have not yet won, I have deserved!"

"You see, lady," said Agelastes, who, apprehending that the last speech of the Cæsar had made some impression, hastened to follow it up with a suitable observation; "you see that the fire of chivalry burns as gallantly in the bosom of the Grecians as in that of the Western nations."

"Yes," answered Brenhilda, "and I have heard of the celebrated siege of Troy, on which occasion a dastardly coward carried off the wife of a brave man, shunned every proffer of encounter with the husband whom he had wronged, and finally caused the death of his numerous

brothers, the destruction of his native city, with all the wealth which it contained, and died himself the death of a pitiful poltroon, lamented only by his worthless leman, to show how well the rules of chivalry were understood by your predecessors."

"Lady, you mistake," said the Cæsar: "the offences of Paris were those of a dissolute Asiatic; the courage which avenged them was that of the Greek Empire."

"You are learned, sir," said the lady; "but think not that I will trust your words until you produce before me a Grecian knight, gallant enough to look upon the armed crest of my husband without quaking."

"That, methinks, were not extremely difficult," returned the Cæsar. "If they have not flattered me, I have myself been thought equal in battle to more dangerous men than him who has been strangely mated with the Lady Brenhilda."

"That is soon tried," answered the Countess. "You will hardly, I think, deny that my husband, separated from me by some unworthy trick, is still at thy command, and could be produced at thy pleasure. I will ask no armour for him save what he wears, no weapon but his good sword Tranchefer; then place him in this chamber, or any other lists equally narrow, and if he flinch, or cry craven, or remain dead under shield, let Brenhilda be the prize of the conqueror.—Merciful Heaven!" she concluded, as she sank back upon her seat, "forgive me for the crime of even imagining such a termination, which is equal almost to doubting thine unerring judgment!"

"Let me, however," said the Cæsar, "catch up these precious words before they fall to the ground.—Let me hope that he to whom the heavens shall give power and strength to conquer this highly-esteemed Count of Paris, shall succeed him in the affections of Brenhilda; and, believe me, the sun plunges not through the sky to his resting-place with the same celerity that I shall hasten to the encounter."

"Now, by Heaven!" said Count Robert, in an anxious whisper to Hereward, "it is too much to expect me to stand by and hear a contemptible Greek, who durst not stand even the rattling farewell which Tranchefer takes of his scabbard, brave me in my absence, and affect to make love to my lady *par amours*! And she, too—methinks Brenhilda allows more license than she is wont to do to yonder chattering popinjay. By the rood! I will spring into the apartment, front them with my personal appearance, and confute yonder braggart in a manner he is like to remember."

"Under favour," said the Varangian, who was the only auditor of this violent speech, "you shall be ruled by calm reason while I am with you. When we are separated, let the devil of knight errantry, which has such possession of thee, take thee upon his shoulders, and carry thee full tilt wheresoever he lists."

"Thou art a brute," said the Count, looking at him with a contempt corresponding to the expression he made use of; "not only

without humanity, but without the sense of natural honour or natural shame. The most despicable of animals stands not by tamely and sees another assail his mate. The bull offers his horns to a rival—the mastiff uses his jaws—and even the timid stag becomes furious, and gores."

"Because they are beasts," said the Varangian, "and their mistresses also creatures without shame or reason, who are not aware of the sanctity of a choice. But thou, too, Count, canst thou not see the obvious purpose of this poor lady, forsaken by all the world, to keep her

"'He cannot fight the match of which thou seemest so desirous; but here stands Brenhilda" (p. 225).

faith towards thee, by eluding the snares with which wicked men have beset her? By the souls of my fathers! my heart is so much moved by her ingenuity, mingled as I see it is with the most perfect candour and faith, that I myself, in fault of a better champion, would willingly raise the axe in her behalf!"

"I thank thee, my good friend," said the Count; "I thank thee as heartily as if it were possible thou shouldst be left to do that good office for Brenhilda, the beloved of many a noble lord, the mistress of many a powerful vassal; and, what is more, much more than thanks, I crave thy pardon for the wrong I did thee but now."

"My pardon you cannot need," said the Varangian; "for I take no offence that is not seriously meant. Stay, they speak again."

"It is strange it should be so," said the Cæsar, as he paced the apartment; "but methinks, nay, I am almost certain, Agelastes, that I hear voices in the vicinity of this apartment of thy privacy."

"It is impossible," said Agelastes; "but I will go and see."

Perceiving him to leave the pavilion, the Varangian made the Frank sensible that they must crouch down among a little thicket of evergreens, where they lay completely obscured. The philosopher made his rounds with a heavy step, but a watchful eye; and the two listeners were obliged to observe the strictest silence, without motion of any kind, until he had completed an ineffectual search and returned into the pavilion.

"By my faith, brave man," said the Count, "ere we return to our skulking-place, I must tell thee in thine ear, that never, in my life, was temptation so strong upon me as that which prompted me to beat out that old hypocrite's brains, provided I could have reconciled it with my honour; and heartily do I wish that thou, whose honour no way withheld thee, had experienced and given way to some impulse of a similar nature."

"Such fancies have passed through my head," said the Varangian; "but I will not follow them till they are consistent both with our own safety, and more particularly with that of the Countess."

"I thank thee again for thy good-will to her," said Count Robert; "and, by Heaven! if fight we must at length, as it seems likely, I will neither grudge thee an honourable antagonist nor fair quarter, if the combat goes against thee."

"Thou hast my thanks," was the reply of Hereward; "only, for Heaven's sake, be silent in this conjuncture, and do what thou wilt afterwards."

Before the Varangian and the Count had again resumed their posture of listeners, the parties within the pavilion, conceiving themselves unwatched, had resumed their conversation, speaking low, yet with considerable animation.

"It is in vain you would persuade me," said the Countess, "that you know not where my husband is, or that you have not the most absolute influence over his captivity. Who else could have an interest in banishing or putting to death the husband but he that affects to admire the wife?"

"You do me wrong, beautiful lady," answered the Cæsar, "and forget that I can in no shape be termed the moving-spring of this empire; that my father-in-law, Alexius, is the Emperor, and that the woman who terms herself my wife is jealous as a fiend can be of my slightest motion. What possibility was there that I should work the captivity of your husband and your own? The open affront which the Count of Paris put upon the Emperor was one which he was likely to

avenge, either by secret guile or by open force. Me it no way touched, save as the humble vassal of thy charms; and it was by the wisdom and the art of the sage Agelastes, that I was able to extricate thee from the gulf in which thou hadst else certainly perished. Nay, weep not, lady, for as yet we know not the fate of Count Robert; but, credit me, it is wisdom to choose a better protector, and consider him as no more."

"A better than him," said Brenhilda, "I can never have, were I to choose out of the knighthood of all the world!"

"This hand," said the Cæsar, drawing himself into a martial attitude, "should decide that question, were the man of whom thou thinkest so much yet moving on the face of this earth, and at liberty."

"Thou art," said Brenhilda, looking fixedly at him with the fire of indignation flashing from every feature—"thou art—but it avails not telling thee what is thy real name: believe me, the world shall one day ring with it, and be justly sensible of its value. Observe what I am about to say—Robert of Paris is gone—or captive, I know not where. He cannot fight the match of which thou seemest so desirous; but here stands Brenhilda, born heiress of Aspramonte, by marriage the wedded wife of the good Count of Paris. She was never matched in the lists by mortal man, except the valiant Count, and since thou art so grieved that thou canst not meet her husband in battle, thou canst not surely object, if she is willing to meet thee in his stead?"

"How, madam?" said the Cæsar, astonished; "do you propose yourself to hold the lists against me?"

"Against you!" said the Countess; "against all the Grecian Empire, if they shall affirm that Robert of Paris is justly used and lawfully confined."

"And are the conditions," said the Cæsar, "the same as if Count Robert himself held the lists? The vanquished must then be at the pleasure of the conqueror for good or evil."

"It would seem so," said the Countess, "nor do I refuse the hazard; only, that if the other champion shall bite the dust, the noble Count Robert shall be set at liberty, and permitted to depart with all suitable honours."

"This I refuse not," said the Cæsar, "provided it is in my power."

A deep growling sound, like that of a modern gong, here interrupted the conference.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Varangian and Count Robert, at every risk of discovery, had remained so near as fully to conjecture, though they could not expressly overhear, the purport of the conversation.

"He has accepted her challenge!" said the Count of Paris.

"And with apparent willingness," said Hereward.

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless," answered the Crusader; "but he knows not the skill in war which a woman may attain; for my part, God knows I have enough depending upon the issue of this contest, yet such is my confidence that I would to God I had more. I vow to our Lady of the Broken Lances that I desire every furrow of land I possess—every honour which I can call my own, from the Countship of Paris down to the leather that binds my spur, were dependent and at issue upon this fair field, between your Cæsar, as men term him, and Brenhilda of Aspramonte."

"It is a noble confidence," said the Varangian, "nor durst I say it is a rash one; only I cannot but remember that the Cæsar is a strong man as well as a handsome, expert in the use of arms, and, above all, less strictly bound than you esteem yourself by the rules of honour. There are many ways in which advantage may be given and taken, which will not, in the Cæsar's estimation, alter the character of the field from an equal one, although it might do so in the opinion of the chivalrous Count of Paris, or even in that of the poor Varangian. But first let me conduct you to some place of safety, for your escape must be soon, if it is not already detected. The sounds which we heard intimate that some of his confederate plotters have visited the garden on other than love affairs. I will guide thee to another avenue than that by which

we entered. But you would hardly, I suppose, be pleased to adopt the wisest alternative?"

"And what may that be?" said the Count.

"To give thy purse, though it were thine all, to some poor ferryman to waft thee over the Hellespont, then hasten to carry thy complaint to Godfrey of Bouillon, and what friends thou mayst have among thy brethren crusaders, and determine, as thou easily canst, on a sufficient number of them to come back and menace the city with instant war, unless the Emperor should deliver up thy lady, most unfairly made prisoner, and prevent, by his authority, this absurd and unnatural combat."

"And would you have me then," said Count Robert, "move the crusaders to break a fairly appointed field of battle? Do you think that Godfrey of Bouillon would turn back upon his pilgrimage for such an unworthy purpose; or that the Countess of Paris would accept as a service, means of safety which would stain her honour for ever, by breaking an appointment solemnly made on her own challenge?—Never!"

"My judgment is then at fault," said the Varangian, "for I see I can hammer out no expedient which is not, in some extravagant manner or another, controlled by your foolish notions. Here is a man who has been trapped into the power of his enemy, that he might not interfere to prevent a base stratagem upon his lady, involving both her life and honour; yet he thinks it a matter of necessity that he keeps faith as precisely with these midnight poisoners, as he would had it been pledged to the most honourable men!"

"Thou say'st a painful truth," said Count Robert; "but my word is the emblem of my faith; and if I pass it to a dishonourable or faithless foe, it is imprudently done on my part; but if I break it, being once pledged, it is a dishonourable action, and the disgrace can never be washed from my shield."

"Do you mean, then," said the Varangian, "to suffer your wife's honour to remain pledged as it at present is, on the event of an unequal combat?"

"God and the saints pardon thee such a thought!" said the Count of Paris. "I will go to see this combat with a heart as firm, if not as light, as any time I ever saw spears splintered. If by the influence of any accident or treachery (for fairly, and with such an antagonist, Brenhilda of Aspramonte cannot be overthrown), I step into the lists, proclaim the Cæsar as he is—a villain—show the falsehood of his conduct from beginning to end,—appeal to every noble heart that hears me, and then—God show the right!"

Hereward paused and shook his head. "All this," he said, "might be feasible enough, provided the combat were to be fought in the presence of your own countrymen, or even, by the mass! if the Varangians were to be guards of the lists. But treachery of every

kind is so familiar to the Greeks, that I question if they would view the conduct of their Cæsar as anything else than a pardonable and natural stratagem of Dan Cupid, to be smiled at rather than subjected to disgrace or punishment."

"A nation," said Count Robert, "who could smile at such a jest, may Heaven refuse them sympathy at their utmost need, when their sword is broken in their hand, and their wives and daughters shrieking in the relentless grasp of a barbarous enemy!"

Hereward looked upon his companion, whose flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes bore witness to his enthusiasm.

"I see," he said, "you are resolved, and I know that your resolution can in justice be called by no other name than an act of heroic folly. What then? it is long since life has been bitter to the Varangian exile. Morn has raised him from a joyless bed, which night has seen him lie down upon, wearied with wielding a mercenary weapon in the wars of strangers. He has longed to lay down his life in an honourable cause, and this is one in which the extremity and very essence of honour is implicated. It tallies also with my scheme of saving the Emperor, which will be greatly facilitated by the downfall of his ungrateful son-in-law." Then addressing himself to the Count, he continued, "Well, Sir Count, as thou art the person principally concerned, I am willing to yield to thy reasoning in this affair; but I hope you will permit me to mingle with your resolution some advices of a more everyday and less fantastic nature. For example, thy escape from the dungeons of the Blacquernal must soon be generally known. In prudence, indeed, I myself must be the first to communicate it, since otherwise the suspicion will fall on me. Where do you think of concealing yourself? for assuredly the search will be close and general."

"For that," said the Count of Paris, "I must be indebted to thy suggestion, with thanks for every lie which thou findest thyself obliged to make, to contrive, and produce in my behalf, entreating thee only to render them as few as possible, they being a coin which I myself never fabricate."

"Sir Knight," answered Hereward, "let me begin first by saying that no knight that ever belted sword is more a slave to truth, when truth is observed towards him, than the poor soldier who talks to thee; but when the game depends not upon fair play, but upon lulling men's cautiousness asleep by falsehood, and drugging their senses by opiate draughts, they who would scruple at no means of deceiving me can hardly expect that I, who am paid in such base money, should pass nothing on my part but what is lawful and genuine. For the present thou must remain concealed within my poor apartment, in the barracks of the Varangians, which is the last place where they will think of seeking for thee. Take this, my upper cloak, and follow me; and now that we are about to leave these gardens, thou mayst follow me un-

suspected as a sentinel attending his officer; for, take it along with you, noble Count, that we Varangians are a sort of persons upon whom the Greeks care not to look very long or fixedly."

They now reached the gate where they had been admitted by the negress, and Hereward, who was intrusted with the power, it seems, of letting himself out of the philosopher's premises, though not of entering without assistance from the portress. took out a key which turned the lock on the garden side, so that they soon found themselves at liberty. They then proceeded by by-paths through the city, Hereward leading the way, and the Count following, without speech or remonstrance, until they stood before the portal of the barracks of the Varangians.

"The demon of suspicion was not very likely to molest a mind so frankly constituted as that of Count Robert, and yet the last action of Hereward did not fail to occasion some painful reflections."

"Make haste," said the sentinel who was on duty, "dinner is already begun." The communication sounded joyfully in the ears of Hereward, who was much afraid that his companion might have been stopped and examined. By a side passage he reached his own quarters, and introduced the Count into a small room, the sleeping chamber of his squire, where he apologised for leaving him for some time; and, going out, locked the door, for fear, as he said, of intrusion.

The demon of suspicion was not very likely to molest a mind so frankly constituted as that of Count Robert, and yet the last action of Hereward did not fail to occasion some painful reflections.

"This man," he said, "had needs be true, for I have reposed in

him a mighty trust, which few hirelings in his situation would honourably discharge. What is to prevent him to report to the principal officer of his watch that the Frank prisoner, Robert Count of Paris, whose wife stands engaged for so desperate a combat with the Cæsar, has escaped, indeed, this morning, from the prisons of the Blacquernal, but has suffered himself to be trepanned at noon, and is again a captive in the barracks of the Varangian Guard?—what means of defence are mine, were I discovered to these mercenaries? What man could do, by the favour of our Lady of the Broken Lances, I have not failed to achieve. I have slain a tiger in single combat—I have killed one warder, and conquered the desperate and gigantic creature by whom he was supported. I have had terms enough at command to bring over this Varangian to my side, in appearance at least; yet all this does not encourage me to hope that I could long keep at bay ten or a dozen such men as these beef-fed knaves appear to be, led in upon me by a fellow of thews and sinews such as those of my late companion.—Yet, for shame, Robert! such thoughts are unworthy a descendant of Charlemagne. When wert thou wont so curiously to count thine enemies, and when wert thou wont to be suspicious, since he, whose bosom may truly boast itself incapable of fraud, ought in honesty to be the last to expect it in another? The Varangian's look is open, his coolness in danger is striking, his speech is more frank and ready than ever was that of a traitor. If he is false, there is no faith in the hand of nature, for truth, sincerity, and courage are written upon his forehead."

While Count Robert was thus reflecting upon his condition, and combating the thick-coming doubts and suspicions which its uncertainties gave rise to, he began to be sensible that he had not eaten for many hours; and amidst many doubts and fears of a more heroic nature, he half entertained a lurking suspicion that they meant to let hunger undermine his strength before they adventured into the apartment to deal with him.

We shall best see how far these doubts were deserved by Hereward, or how far they were unjust, by following his course after he left his barrack-room. Snatching a morsel of dinner, which he ate with an affectation of great hunger, but, in fact, that his attention to his food might be a pretence for dispensing with disagreeable questions, or with conversation of any kind, he pleaded duty, and immediately leaving his comrades, directed his course to the lodgings of Achilles Tatius, which were a part of the same building. A Syrian slave, who opened the door, after a deep reverence to Hereward, whom he knew as a favourite attendant of the Acolyte, said to him that his master was gone forth, but had desired him to say, that if he wished to see him he would find him at the Philosopher's Gardens, so called, as belonging to the sage Agelastes.

Hereward turned about instantly, and availing himself of his knowledge of Constantinople to thread its streets in the shortest time

"The door opened; a lofty plume stooped itself" (p. 232).

possible, at length stood alone before the door in the garden-wall, at which he and the Count of Paris had previously been admitted in the earlier part of the day. The same negress appeared at the same private signal, and when he asked for Achilles Tatius, she replied, with some

sharpness, "Since you were here this morning, I marvel you did not meet him, or that, having business with him, you did not stay till he arrived. Sure I am, that not long after you entered the garden the Acolyte was inquiring for you."

"It skills not, old woman," said the Varangian; "I communicate the reason of my motions to my commander, but not to thee." He entered the garden accordingly, and, avoiding the twilight-path that led to the Bower of Love—so was the pavilion named in which he had overheard the dialogue between the Cæsar and the Countess of Paris—he arrived before a simple garden-house, whose humble and modest front seemed to announce that it was the abode of philosophy and learning. Here, passing before the windows, he made some little noise, expecting to attract the attention either of Achilles Tatius, or his accomplice Agelastes, as chance should determine. It was the first who heard and who replied. The door opened; a lofty plume stooped itself, that its owner might cross the threshold, and the stately form of Achilles Tatius entered the gardens. "What now," he said, "our trusty sentinel? what hast thou, at this time of day, come to report to us? Thou art our good friend and highly-esteemed soldier, and well we wot thine errand must be of importance, since thou hast brought it thyself and at an hour so unusual."

"Pray Heaven," said Hereward, "that the news I have brought deserve a welcome."

"Speak them instantly," said the Acolyte, "good or bad; thou speakest to a man to whom fear is unknown." But his eye, which quailed as he looked on the soldier—his colour, which went and came—his hands, which busied themselves in an uncertain manner in adjusting the belt of his sword, all argued a state of mind very different from that which his tone of defiance would fain have implied. "Courage," he said, "my trusty soldier! speak the news to me. I can bear the worst thou hast to tell."

"In a word, then," said the Varangian, "your Valour directed me this morning to play the office of master of the rounds upon those dungeons of the Blacquernal Palace where last night the boisterous Count Robert of Paris was incarcerated——"

"I remember well," said Achilles Tatius. "What then?"

"As I reposed me," said Hereward, "in an apartment above the vaults, I heard cries from beneath, of a kind which attracted my attention. I hastened to examine, and my surprise was extreme, when, looking down into the dungeon, though I could see nothing distinctly, yet, by the wailing and whimpering sounds, I conceived that the man of the forest, the animal called Sylvan, whom our soldiers have so far indoctrinated in our Saxon tongue as to make him useful in the wards of the prison, was bemoaning himself on account of some violent injury. Descending with a torch, I found the bed on which the prisoner had been let down burnt to cinders; the tiger which had been chained

within a spring of it with its skull broken to pieces; the creature called Sylvan, prostrate and writhing under great pain and terror, and no prisoner whatever in the dungeon. There were marks that all the fastenings had been withdrawn by a Mitylenian soldier, companion of my watch, when he visited the dungeon at the usual hour; and as, in my anxious search, I at length found his dead body, slain apparently by a stab in the throat, I was obliged to believe that, while I was examining the cell, he, this Count Robert, with whose daring life the adventure is well consistent, had escaped to the upper air, by means, doubtless, of the ladder and trap-door by which I had descended."

"And wherefore didst thou not instantly call treason, and raise the hue and cry?" demanded the Acolyte.

"I dared not venture to do so," replied the Varangian, "till I had instructions from your Valour. The alarming cry of treason, and the various rumours likely at this moment to ensue, might have involved a search so close, as perchance would have discovered matters in which the Acolyte himself would have been rendered subject to suspicion."

"Thou art right," said Achilles Tatius, in a whisper; "and yet it will be necessary that we do not pretend any longer to conceal the flight of this important prisoner, if we would not pass for being his accomplices. Where thinkest thou this unhappy fugitive can have taken refuge?"

"That I was in hopes of learning from your Valour's greater wisdom," said Hereward.

"Thinkest thou not," said Achilles, "that he may have crossed the Hellespont, in order to rejoin his own countrymen and adherents?"

"It is much to be dreaded," said Hereward. "Undoubtedly, if the Count listened to the advice of any one who knew the face of the country, such would be the very counsel he would receive."

"The danger, then, of his return at the head of a vengeful body of Franks," said the Acolyte, "is not so immediate as I apprehended at first; for the Emperor gave positive orders that the boats and galleys which yesterday transported the crusaders to the shores of Asia should recross the strait and bring back no single one of them from the step upon their journey on which he had so far furthered them. Besides, they all—their leaders, that is to say—made their vows before crossing that they would not turn back so much as a foot's pace, now that they had set actually forth on the road to Palestine."

"So, therefore," said Hereward, "one of two propositions is unquestionable—either Count Robert is on the eastern side of the strait, having no means of returning with his brethren to avenge the usage he has received, and may therefore be securely set at defiance; or else he lurks somewhere in Constantinople, without a friend or ally to take his part, or encourage him openly to state his supposed wrongs: in either case, there can, I think, be no tact in conveying to the palace

the news that he has freed himself, since it would only alarm the court, and afford the Emperor ground for many suspicions. But it is not for an ignorant barbarian like me to prescribe a course of conduct to your valour and wisdom, and methinks the sage Agelastes were a fitter counsellor than such as I am."

"No, no, no," said the Acolyte, in a hurried whisper; "the philosopher and I are right good friends, sworn good friends, very especially bound together; but should it come to this, that one of us must needs throw before the footstool of the Emperor the head of the other, I think thou wouldst not advise that I, whose hairs have not a trace of silver, should be the last in making the offering; therefore we will say nothing of this mishap, but give thee full power and the highest charge to seek for Count Robert of Paris, be he dead or alive, to secure him within the dungeons set apart for the discipline of our own corps, and when thou hast done so, to bring me notice. I may make him my friend in many ways by extricating his wife from danger by the axes of my Varangians. What is there in this metropolis that they have to oppose them?"

"When raised in a just cause," answered Hereward, "nothing."

"Hah! say'st thou?" said the Acolyte; "how meanest thou by that?—but I know. Thou art scrupulous about having the just and lawful command of thy officer in every action in which thou art engaged, and, thinking in that dutiful and soldierlike manner, it is my duty as thine Acolyte to see thy scruples satisfied. A warrant shalt thou have, with full powers, to seek for and imprison this foreign Count of whom we have been speaking. And, hark thee, my excellent friend," he continued, with some hesitation, "I think thou hadst better begone, and begin, or rather continue thy search. It is unnecessary to inform our friend Agelastes of what has happened, until his advice be more needful than as yet it is on the occasion. Home—home to the barracks; I will account to him for thy appearance here, if he be curious on the subject, which, as a suspicious old man, he is likely to be. Go to the barracks and act as if thou hadst a warrant in every respect full and ample. I will provide thee with one when I come back to my quarters."

The Varangian turned hastily homewards.

"Now, is it not," he said, "a strange thing, and enough to make a man a rogue for life—to observe how the devil encourages young beginners in falsehood! I have told a greater lie—at least I have suppressed more truth—than on any occasion before in my whole life—and what is the consequence? Why, my commander throws almost at my head a warrant sufficient to guarantee and protect me in all I have done, or propose to do! If the foul fiend were thus regular in protecting his votaries, methinks they would have little reason to complain of him, or better men to be astonished at their number. But a time comes, they say, when he seldom fails to desert them. Therefore, get

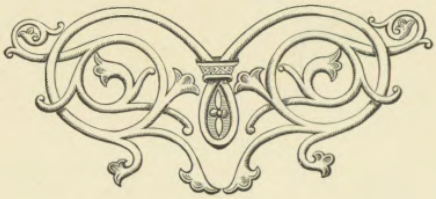
thee behind me, Satan! If I have seemed to be thy servant for a short time, it is but with an honest and Christian purpose."

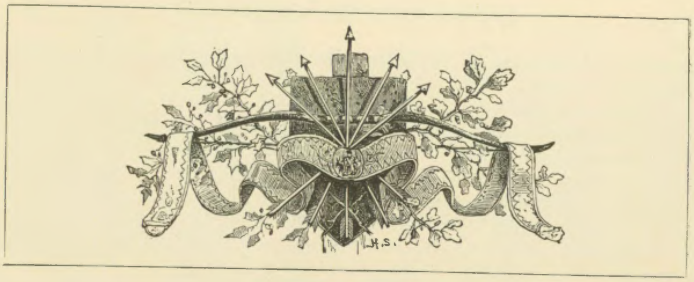
As he entertained these thoughts, he looked back upon the path, and was startled at an apparition of a creature of a much greater size and a stranger shape than human, covered, all but the face, with a reddish-dun fur; his expression an ugly, and yet a sad melancholy; a cloth was wrapped round one hand, and an air of pain and languor bespoke suffering from a wound. So much was Hereward preoccupied with his own reflections that at first he thought his imagination had actually raised the devil; but after a sudden start of surprise he recognised his acquaintance Sylvan. "Hah! old friend," he said, "I am happy thou hast made thy escape to a place where thou wilt find plenty of fruit to support thee. Take my advice—keep out of the way of discovery.—Keep thy friend's counsel."

The Man of the Wood uttered a chattering noise in return to this address.

"I understand thee," said Hereward, "thou wilt tell no tales, thou sayest; and faith I will trust thee rather than the better part of my own two-legged race, who are eternally circumventing or murdering each other."

A minute after the creature was out of sight Hereward heard the shriek of a female, and a voice which cried for help. The accents must have been uncommonly interesting to the Varangian, since, forgetting his own dangerous situation, he immediately turned and flew to the suppliant's assistance.





CHAPTER XX.

"She comes! she comes! in all the charms of youth,
Unequall'd love, and unsuspected truth!"

HEREWARD was not long in tracing the cry through the wooded walks, when a female rushed into his arms; alarmed, as it appeared, by Sylvan, who was pursuing her closely. The figure of Hereward, with his axe uplifted, put an instant stop to his career, and with a terrified note of his native cries he withdrew into the thickest of the adjoining foliage.

Relieved from his presence, Hereward had time to look at the female whom he had succoured: she was arrayed in a dress which consisted of several colours, that which predominated being a pale yellow; her tunic was of this colour, and, like a modern gown, was closely fitted to the body, which, in the present case, was that of a tall, but very well-formed person. The mantle, or upper garment, in which the whole figure was wrapped, was of fine cloth; and the kind of hood which was attached to it, having flown back with the rapidity of her motion, gave to view the hair, beautifully adorned and twisted into a natural head-dress. Beneath this natural head-gear appeared a face pale as death, from a sense of the supposed danger, but which preserved, even amidst its terrors, an exquisite degree of beauty.

Hereward was thunderstruck at this apparition. The dress was neither Grecian, Italian, nor of the costume of the Franks;—it was *Saxon!*—connected by a thousand tender remembrances with Hereward's childhood and youth. The circumstance was most extraordinary. Saxon women, indeed, there were in Constantinople, who had united their fortunes with those of the Varangians; and those often chose to wear their national dress in the city, because the character and conduct of their husbands secured them a degree of respect, which they might

not have met with either as Grecian or as stranger females of a similar rank. But almost all these were personally known to Hereward. It was no time, however, for reverie—he was himself in danger—the situation of the young female might be no safe one. In every case, it was judicious to quit the more public part of the gardens; he therefore lost not a moment in conveying the fainting Saxon to a retreat he fortunately was acquainted with. A covered path, obscured by vegetation, led through a species of labyrinth to an artificial cave, at the bottom of which, half-paved with shells, moss, and spar, lay the gigantic and half-recumbent statue of a river deity, with its usual attributes—that is, its front crowned with water-lilies and sedges, and its ample hand half-resting upon an empty urn. The attitude of the whole figure corresponded with the motto,—"I SLEEP—AWAKE ME NOT."

"Accursed relic of paganism," said Hereward, who was, in proportion to his light, a zealous Christian—"brutish stock or stone that thou art! I will wake thee with a vengeance." So saying, he struck the head of the slumbering deity with his battle-axe and deranged the play of the fountain so much that the water began to pour into the basin.

"Thou art a good block nevertheless," said the Varangian, "to send succour so needful to the aid of my poor countrywoman. Thou shalt give her also, with thy leave, a portion of thy couch." So saying, he arranged his fair burden, who was as yet insensible, upon the pedestal where the figure of the River God reclined. In doing this, his attention was recalled to her face, and again and again he was thrilled with an emotion of hope, but so excessively like fear, that it could only be compared to the flickering of a torch, uncertain whether it is to light up or be instantly extinguished. With a sort of mechanical attention, he continued to make such efforts as he could to recall the intellect of the beautiful creature before him. His feelings were those of the astronomical sage, to whom the rise of the moon slowly restores the contemplation of that heaven, which is at once, as a Christian, his hope of felicity, and, as a philosopher, the source of his knowledge. The blood returned to her cheek, and reanimation, and even recollection, took place in her earlier than in the astonished Varangian.

"Blessed Mary!" she said, "have I indeed tasted the last bitter cup, and is it here where thou reunitest thy votaries after death!—Speak, Hereward! if thou art aught but an empty creature of the imagination!—speak, and tell me if I have but dreamed of that monstrous ogre!"

"Collect thyself, my beloved Bertha," said the Anglo-Saxon, recalled by the sound of her voice, "and prepare to endure what thou livest to witness, and thy Hereward survives to tell. That hideous thing exists—nay, do not start and look for a hiding-place—thy own gentle hand with a riding rod is sufficient to tame its courage. And am I not here, Bertha? Wouldst thou wish another safeguard?"

"No—no," exclaimed she, seizing on the arm of her recovered lover. "Do I not know you now?"

"And is it but now you know me, Bertha?" said Hereward.

"I suspected before," she said, casting down her eyes; "but I know with certainty that mark of the boar's tusk."

Hereward suffered her imagination to clear itself from the shock it had received so suddenly, before he ventured to enter upon present events, in which there was so much both to doubt and to fear. He permitted her, therefore, to recall to her memory all the circumstances of the rousing the hideous animal, assisted by the tribes of both their fathers. She mentioned in broken words the flight of arrows discharged against the boar by young and old, male and female, and how her own well-aimed, but feeble shaft wounded him sharply; she forgot not how, incensed at the pain, the creature rushed upon her as the cause, laid her palfrey dead upon the spot, and would soon have slain her, had not Hereward, when every attempt failed to bring his horse up to the monster, thrown himself from his seat, and interposed personally between the boar and Bertha. The battle was not decided without a desperate struggle; the boar was slain, but Hereward received the deep gash upon his brow which she whom he had saved now recalled to her memory. "Alas!" she said, "what have we been to each other since that period? and what are we now, in this foreign land?"

"Answer for thyself, my Bertha," said the Varangian, "if thou canst;—and if thou canst with truth say that thou art the same Bertha who vowed affection to Hereward, believe me, it were sinful to suppose that the saints have brought us together with a view of our being afterwards separated."

"Hereward," said Bertha, "you have not preserved the bird in your bosom safer than I have; at home or abroad, in servitude or in freedom, amidst sorrow or joy, plenty or want, my thought was always on the troth I had plighted to Hereward at the stone of Odin."

"Say no more of that," said Hereward; "it was an impious rite, and good could not come of it."

"Was it then so impious?" she said, the unbidden tear rushing into her large blue eye. "Alas! it was a pleasure to reflect that Hereward was mine by that solemn engagement!"

"Listen to me, my Bertha," said Hereward, taking her hand. "We were then almost children; and though our vow was in itself innocent, yet it was so far wrong, as being sworn in the presence of a dumb idol, representing one who was, while alive, a bloody and cruel magician. But we will, the instant an opportunity offers itself, renew our vow before a shrine of real sanctity, and promise suitable penance for our ignorant acknowledgment of Odin, to propitiate the real Deity, who can bear us through those storms of adversity which are like to surround us."

Leaving them for the time to their love-discourse, of a nature pure,

"In doing this, his attention was recalled to her face" (p. 237).

simple, and interesting, we shall give, in few words, all that the reader needs to know of their separate history between the boar's hunt and the time of their meeting in the gardens of Agelastes.

In that doubtful state experienced by outlaws, Waltheoff, the father of Hereward, and Engelred, the parent of Bertha, used to assemble their unsubdued tribes, sometimes in the fertile regions of Devonshire, sometimes in the dark wooded solitudes of Hampshire, but as much as possible within the call of the bugle of the famous Ederic the Forester, so long leader of the insurgent Saxons. The chiefs we have mentioned were among the last bold men who asserted the independence of the Saxon race of England; and like their captain, Ederic, they were generally known by the name of Foresters, as men who lived by hunting, when their power of making excursions was checked and repelled. Hence they made a step backwards in civilisation, and became more like to their remote ancestors of German descent, than they were to their more immediate and civilised predecessors, who, before the battle of Hastings, had advanced considerably in the arts of civilised life.

Old superstitions had begun to revive among them, and hence the practice of youths and maidens plighting their troth at the stone circles dedicated, as it was supposed, to Odin, in whom, however, they had long ceased to nourish any of the sincere belief which was entertained by their heathen ancestors.

In another respect, these outlaws were fast reassuming a striking peculiarity of the ancient Germans. Their circumstances naturally brought the youth of both sexes much together, and by early marriage, or less permanent connections, the population would have increased far beyond the means which the outlaws had to maintain, or even to protect themselves. The laws of the Foresters, therefore, strictly enjoined that marriages should be prohibited until the bridegroom was twenty-one years complete. Future alliances were indeed often formed by the young people, nor was this discountenanced by their parents, provided that the lovers waited until the period when the majority of the bridegroom should permit them to marry. Such youths as infringed this rule incurred the dishonourable epithet of *niddering*, or worthless, —an epithet of a nature so insulting that men were known to have slain themselves rather than endure life under such opprobrium. But the offenders were very few amidst a race trained in moderation and self-denial; and hence it was that woman, worshipped for so many years like something sacred, was received, when she became the head of a family, into the arms and heart of a husband who had so long expected her, was treated as something more elevated than the mere idol of the moment; and feeling the rate at which she was valued, endeavoured by her actions to make her life correspond with it.

It was by the whole population of these tribes as well as their parents, that after the adventure of the boar hunt, Hereward and Bertha

were considered as lovers whose alliance was pointed out by Heaven, and they were encouraged to approximate as much as their mutual inclinations prompted them. The youths of the tribe avoided asking Bertha's hand at the dance, and the maidens used no maidenly entreaty or artifice to detain Hereward beside them, if Bertha was present at the feast. They clasped each other's hands through the perforated stone, which they called the altar of Odin, though later ages have ascribed it to the Druids, and they implored that if they broke their faith to each other, their fault might be avenged by the twelve swords which were now drawn around them during the ceremony by as many youths, and that their misfortunes might be so many as twelve maidens, who stood around with their hair loosened, should be unable to recount, either in prose or verse.

The torch of the Saxon Cupid shone for some years as brilliant as when it was first lighted. The time, however, came when they were to be tried by adversity, though undeserved by the perfidy of either. Years had gone past, and Hereward had to count with anxiety how many months and weeks were to separate him from the bride, who was beginning already by degrees to shrink less shyly from the expressions and caresses of one who was soon to term her all his own. William Rufus, however, had formed a plan of totally extirpating the Foresters, whose implacable hatred, and restless love of freedom, had so often disturbed the quiet of his kingdom, and despised his forest laws. He assembled his Norman forces, and united to them a body of Saxons who had submitted to his rule. He thus brought an overpowering force upon the bands of Waltheoff and Engelred, who found no resource but to throw the females of their tribe, and such as could not bear arms, into a convent dedicated to St. Augustin, of which Kenelm their relation was prior, and then turning to the battle, vindicated their ancient valour by fighting it to the last. Both the unfortunate chiefs remained dead on the field, and Hereward and his brother had well-nigh shared their fate; but some Saxon inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who adventured on the field of battle, which the victors had left bare of everything save the booty of the kites and the ravens, found the bodies of the youths still retaining life. As they were generally well known and much beloved by these people, Hereward and his brother were taken care of till their wounds began to close and their strength returned. Hereward then heard the doleful news of the death of his father and Engelred. His next inquiry was concerning his betrothed bride and her mother. The poor inhabitants could give him little information. Some of the females who had taken refuge in the convent, the Norman knights and nobles had seized upon as their slaves, and the rest, with the monks who had harboured them, were turned adrift, and their place of retreat was completely sacked and burnt to the ground.

Half-dead himself at hearing these tidings, Hereward sallied out,

and at every risk of death—for the Saxon Foresters were treated as outlaws—commenced inquiries after those so dear to him. He asked concerning the particular fate of Bertha and her mother among the

"Some of the females who had taken refuge in the convent, the Norman knights and nobles had seized upon as their slaves" (p. 242).

miserable creatures who yet hovered about the neighbourhood of the convent like a few half-scorched bees about their smothered hive. But, in the magnitude of their own terrors, none had retained eyes for their

neighbours, and all that they could say was, that the wife and daughter of Engelred were certainly lost; and their imaginations suggested so many heart-rending details to this conclusion, that Hereward gave up all thoughts of further researches, likely to terminate so uselessly and so horribly.

The young Saxon had been all his life bred up in a patriotic hatred to the Normans, who did not, it was likely, become dearer to his thoughts in consequence of this victory. He dreamed at first of crossing the Strait, to make war against the hated enemy in their own country; but an idea so extravagant did not long retain possession of his mind. His fate was decided by his encountering an aged palmer, who knew, or pretended to have known, his father, and to be a native of England. This man was a disguised Varangian, selected for the purpose, possessed of art and dexterity, and well provided with money. He had little difficulty in persuading Hereward, in the hopeless desolation of his condition, to join the Varangian Guard, at this moment at war with the Normans, under which name it suited Hereward's prepossessions to represent the Emperor's wars with Robert Guiscard, his son Bohemond, and other adventurers, in Italy, Greece, or Sicily. A journey to the East also inferred a pilgrimage, and gave the unfortunate Hereward the chance of purchasing pardon for his sins by visiting the Holy Land. In gaining Hereward, the recruiter also secured the services of his elder brother, who had vowed not to separate from him.

The high character of both brothers for courage induced this wily agent to consider them as a great prize, and it was from the memoranda respecting the history and character of those whom he recruited, in which the elder had been unreservedly communicative, that Agelastes picked up the information respecting Hereward's family and circumstances, which, at their first secret interview, he made use of to impress upon the Varangian the idea of his supernatural knowledge. Several of his companions in arms were thus gained over; for it will easily be guessed that these memorials were entrusted to the keeping of Achilles Tatius, and he, to further their joint purposes, imparted them to Agelastes, who thus obtained a general credit for supernatural knowledge among these ignorant men. But Hereward's blunt faith and honesty enabled him to shun the snare.

Such being the fortunes of Hereward, those of Bertha formed the subject of a broken and passionate communication between the lovers, broken like an April day, and mingled with many a tender caress, such as modesty permits to lovers when they meet again unexpectedly after a separation which threatened to be eternal. But the story may be comprehended in few words. Amid the general sack of the monastery an old Norman knight seized upon Bertha as his prize. Struck with her beauty, he designed her as an attendant upon his daughter, just then come out of the years of childhood, and the very apple of her father's eye, being the only child of his beloved countess, and sent

late in life to bless their marriage bed. It was in the order of things that the Lady of Aspramonte, who was considerably younger than the knight, should govern her husband, and that Brenhilda, their daughter, should govern both her parents.

The Knight of Aspramonte, however, it may be observed, entertained some desire to direct his young offspring to more feminine amusements than those which began already to put her life frequently in danger. Contradiction was not to be thought of, as the good old knight knew by experience. The influence and example of a companion a little older than herself might be of some avail, and it was with this view that, in the confusion of the sack, Aspramonte seized upon the youthful Bertha. Terrified to the utmost degree, she clung to her mother, and the Knight of Aspramonte, who had a softer heart than was then usually found under a steel cuirass, moved by the affliction of the mother and daughter, and recollecting that the former might also be a useful attendant upon his lady, extended his protection to both, and conveying them out of the press, paid the soldiers who ventured to dispute the spoil with him partly in some small pieces of money and partly in dry blows with the reverse of his lance.

The well-natured knight soon after returned to his own castle, and being a man of an orderly life and virtuous habits, the charming beauties of the Saxon virgin, and the more ripened charms of her mother, did not prevent their travelling in all honour as well as safety to his family fortress, the Castle of Aspramonte. Here such masters as could be procured were got together to teach the young Bertha every sort of female accomplishment, in the hope that her mistress, Brenhilda, might be inspired with a desire to partake in her education; but although this so far succeeded that the Saxon captive became highly skilled in such music, needlework, and other female accomplishments as were known to the time, yet her young mistress, Brenhilda, retained the taste for those martial amusements which had so sensibly grieved her father, but to which her mother, who herself had nourished such fancies in her youth, readily gave sanction.

The captives, however, were kindly treated. Brenhilda became infinitely attached to the young Anglo-Saxon, whom she loved less for her ingenuity in arts than for her activity in field sports, to which her early state of independence had trained her.

The Lady of Aspramonte was also kind to both the captives; but, in one particular, she exercised a piece of petty tyranny over them. She had imbibed an idea, strengthened by an old doting father-confessor, that the Saxons were heathens at that time, or at least heretics, and made a positive point with her husband that the bondswoman and girl who were to attend on her person and that of her daughter, should be qualified for the office by being anew admitted into the Christian Church by baptism.

Though feeling the falsehood and injustice of the accusation the

mother had sense enough to submit to necessity, and received the name of Martha in all form at the altar, to which she answered during the rest of her life.

But Bertha showed a character upon this occasion inconsistent with the general docility and gentleness of her temper. She boldly refused to be admitted anew into the pale of the Church, of which her conscience told her she was already a member, or to exchange for another the name originally given her at the font. It was in vain that the old knight commanded, that the lady threatened, and that her mother advised and entreated. More closely pressed in private by her mother, she let her motive be known, which had not before been suspected. "I know," she said with a flood of tears, "that my father would have died ere I was subjected to this insult; and then—who shall assure me that vows which were made to the Saxon Bertha will be binding if a French Agatha be substituted in her stead? They may banish me," she said, "or kill me if they will, but if the son of Waltheoff should again meet with the daughter of Engelred, he shall meet that Bertha whom he knew in the forests of Hampton."

All argument was in vain; the Saxon maiden remained obstinate, and to try to break her resolution the Lady of Aspramonte at length spoke of dismissing her from the service of her young mistress and banishing her from the castle. To this also she had made up her mind, and she answered firmly though respectfully that she would sorrow bitterly at parting with her young lady; but as to the rest, she would rather beg under her own name than be recreant to the faith of her fathers, and condemn it as heresy by assuming one of Frank origin. The Lady Brenhilda, in the meantime, entered the chamber where her mother was just about to pass the threatened doom of banishment. "Do not stop for my entrance, madam," said the dauntless young lady; "I am as much concerned in the doom which you are about to pass as is Bertha; if she crosses the drawbridge of Aspramonte as an exile, so will I, when she has dried her tears, of which even my petulance could never wring one from her eyes. She shall be my squire and body attendant, and Launcelot, the bard, shall follow with my spear and shield."

"And you will return, mistress," said her mother, "from so foolish an expedition before the sun sets?"

"So Heaven further me in my purpose, lady," answered the young heiress, "the sun shall neither rise nor set that sees us return, till this name of Bertha, and of her mistress, Brenhilda, are wafted as far as the trumpet of fame can sound them. Cheer up, my sweetest Bertha!" she said, taking her attendant by the hand, "if Heaven hath torn thee from thy country and thy plighted troth, it hath given thee a sister and a friend, with whom thy fame shall be for ever blended."

The Lady of Aspramonte was confounded: she knew that her daughter was perfectly capable of the wild course which she had

announced, and that she herself, even with her husband's assistance, would be unable to prevent her following it. She passively listened, therefore, while the Saxon matron, formerly Urica, but now Martha, addressed her daughter. "My child," she said, "as you value honour, virtue, safety, and gratitude, soften your heart towards your master and mistress, and follow the advice of a parent, who has more years and

"She readily qualified herself to act upon occasion as a squire of the body to a Lady Adventuress" (p. 248).

more judgment than you. And you, my dearest young lady, let not your lady-mother think that an attachment to the exercises you excel in has destroyed in your bosom filial affection and a regard to the delicacy of your sex!—As they seem both obstinate, madam," continued the matron, after watching the influence of this advice upon the young women, "perhaps, if it may be permitted me, I could state an alternative, which might, in the meanwhile, satisfy your ladyship's wishes,

accommodate itself to the wilfulness of my obstinate daughter, and answer the kind purpose of her generous mistress." The Lady of Aspramonte signed to the Saxon matron to proceed. She went on accordingly: "The Saxons, dearest lady, of the present day are neither pagans nor heretics; they are, in the time of keeping Easter, as well as in all other disputable doctrine, humbly obedient to the Pope of Rome; and this our good Bishop well knows, since he upbraided some of the domestics for calling me an old heathen. Yet our names are uncouth in the ears of the Franks, and bear, perhaps, a heathenish sound. If it be not exacted that my daughter submit to a new rite of baptism, she will lay aside her Saxon name of Bertha upon all occasions while in your honourable household. This will cut short a debate which, with forgiveness, I think is scarce of importance enough to break the peace of this castle. I will engage that, in gratitude for this indulgence of a trifling scruple, my daughter, if possible, shall double the zeal and assiduity of her service to her young lady."

The Lady of Aspramonte was glad to embrace the means which this offer presented of extricating herself from the dispute with as little compromise of dignity as could well be. "If the good Lord Bishop approved of such a compromise," she said, "she would for herself withdraw her opposition." The prelate approved accordingly, the more readily that he was informed that the young heiress desired earnestly such an agreement. The peace of the castle was restored, and Bertha recognised her new name of Agatha as a name of service, but not a name of baptism.

One effect the dispute certainly produced, and that was, increasing in an enthusiastic degree the love of Bertha for her young mistress. With that amiable failing of attached domestics and humble friends, she endeavoured to serve her as she knew she loved to be served; and therefore indulged her mistress in those chivalrous fancies which distinguished her even in her own age, and in ours would have rendered her a female Quixote. Bertha, indeed, never caught the frenzy of her mistress; but, strong, willing, and able-bodied, she readily qualified herself to act upon occasion as a squire of the body to a Lady Adventuress; and, accustomed from her childhood to see blows dealt, blood flowing, and men dying, she could look with an undazzled eye upon the dangers which her mistress encountered, and seldom teased her with remonstrances, unless when those were unusually great. This compliance on most occasions gave Bertha a right of advice upon some, which, always given with the best intentions and at fitting times. strengthened her influence with her mistress, which a course of conduct savouring of diametrical opposition would certainly have destroyed.

A few more words serve to announce the death of the Knight of Aspramonte, the romantic marriage of the young lady with the Count of Paris, their engagement in the crusade, and the detail of events with which the reader is acquainted.

Hereward did not exactly comprehend some of the later incidents of the story, owing to a slight strife which arose between Bertha and him during the course of her narrative. When she avowed the girlish simplicity with which she obstinately refused to change her name, because, in her apprehension, the troth-plight betwixt her and her lover might be thereby prejudiced, it was impossible for Hereward not to acknowledge her tenderness, by snatching her to his bosom, and impressing his grateful thanks upon her lips. She extricated herself immediately from his grasp, however, with cheeks more crimsoned in modesty than in anger, and gravely addressed her lover thus: "Enough, enough, Hereward! this may be pardoned to so unexpected a meeting; but we must in future remember that we are probably the last of our race; and let it not be said that the manners of their ancestors were forgotten by Hereward and by Bertha; think, that though we are alone, the shades of our fathers are not far off, and watch to see what use we make of the meeting, which, perhaps, their intercession has procured us."

"You wrong me, Bertha," said Hereward, "if you think me capable of forgetting my own duty and yours, at a moment when our thanks are due to Heaven, to be testified very differently than by infringing on its behests, or the commands of our parents. The question is now, How we shall rejoin each other when we separate? since separate, I fear, we must."

"Oh! do not say so!" exclaimed the unfortunate Bertha.

"It must be so," said Hereward, "for a time; but I swear to thee by the hilt of my sword, and the handle of my battle-axe, that blade was never so true to shaft as I will be to thee!"

"But wherefore, then, leave me, Hereward?" said the maiden; "and, oh! wherefore not assist me in the release of my mistress?"

"Of thy mistress!" said Hereward. "Shame! that thou canst give that name to mortal woman!"

"But she *is* my mistress," answered Bertha, "and by a thousand kind ties, which cannot be separated so long as gratitude is the reward of kindness."

"And what is her danger," said Hereward; "what is it she wants, this accomplished lady whom thou callest mistress?"

"Her honour, her life, are alike in danger," said Bertha. "She has agreed to meet the Cæsar in the field, and he will not hesitate, like a base-born miscreant, to take every advantage in the encounter, which, I grieve to say, may in all likelihood be fatal to my mistress."

"Why dost thou think so?" answered Hereward. "This lady has won many single combats, unless she is belied, against adversaries more formidable than the Cæsar."

"True," said the Saxon maiden; "but you speak of things that passed in a far different land, where faith and honour are not empty sounds; as, alas! they seem but too surely to be here. Trust me, it is

no girlish terror which sends me out in this disguise of my country dress, which, they say, finds respect at Constantinople: I go to let the chiefs of the Crusade know the peril in which the noble lady stands, and trust to their humanity, to their religion, to their love of honour, and fear of disgrace, for assistance in this hour of need; and now that I have had the blessing of meeting with thee, all besides will go well—all will go well—and I will back to my mistress and report whom I have seen."

"Tarry yet another moment, my recovered treasure!" said Hereward, "and let me balance this matter carefully. This Frankish lady holds the Saxons like the very dust that thou brushest from the hem of her garment. She treats—she regards—the Saxons as pagans and heretics. She has dared to impose slavish tasks upon thee, born in freedom. Her father's sword has been embrued to the hilt with Anglo-Saxon blood—perhaps that of Waltheoff and Engelred has added depth to the stain! She has been, besides, a presumptuous fool, usurping for herself the trophies and warlike character which belong to the other sex. Lastly, it will be hard to find a champion to fight in her stead, since all the crusaders have passed over to Asia, which is the land, they say, in which they have come to war; and by orders of the Emperor, no means of return to the hither shore will be permitted to any of them."

"Alas! alas!" said Bertha, "how does this world change us! The son of Waltheoff I once knew, brave, ready to assist distress, bold and generous. Such was what I pictured him to myself during his absence. I have met him again, and he is calculating, cold, and selfish!"

"Hush, damsel," said the Varangian, "and know him of whom thou speakest ere thou judgest him. The Countess of Paris is such as I have said; yet let her appear boldly in the lists, and when the trumpet shall sound thrice, another shall reply, which shall announce the arrival of her own noble lord to do battle in her stead; or should he fail to appear, I will requite her kindness to thee, Bertha, and be ready in his place."

"Wilt thou? wilt thou indeed?" said the damsel; "that was spoken like the son of Waltheoff—like the genuine stock! I will home and comfort my mistress; for surely if the judgment of God ever directed the issue of a judicial combat its influence will descend upon this. But you hint that the Count is here—that he is at liberty—she will inquire about that."

"She must be satisfied," replied Hereward, "to know that her husband is under the guidance of a friend who will endeavour to protect him from his own extravagances and follies; or, at all events, of one who, if he cannot properly be called a friend, has certainly not acted, and will not act, towards him the part of an enemy. And now, farewell, long lost—long loved!——" Before he could say more, the Saxon maiden, after two or three vain attempts to express her gratitude, threw herself into her lover's arms, and, despite the coyness which she

had recently shown, impressed upon his lips the thanks which she could not speak.

They parted, Bertha returning to her mistress at the lodge, which she had left both with trouble and danger, and Hereward by the portal kept by the negro-portress, who, complimenting the handsome Varangian on his success among the fair, intimated, that she had been in some sort a witness of his meeting with the Saxon damsel. A piece of gold, part of a late largesse, amply served to bribe her tongue; and the soldier, clear of the gardens of the philosopher, sped back as he might to the barrack—judging that it was full time to carry some supply to Count Robert, who had been left without food the whole day.

It is a common popular saying, that as the sensation of hunger is not connected with any pleasing or gentle emotion, so it is particularly remarkable for irritating those of anger and spleen. It is not, therefore, very surprising that Count Robert, who had been so unusually long without sustenance, should receive Hereward with a degree of impatience beyond what the occasion merited, and injurious certainly to the honest Varangian, who had repeatedly exposed his life that day for the interest of the Countess and the Count himself.

"Soh, sir!" he said, in that accent of affected restraint by which a superior modifies his displeasure against his inferior into a cold and scornful expression—"You have played a liberal host to us!—Not that it is of consequence; but methinks a Count of the most Christian kingdom dines not every day with a mercenary soldier, and might expect, if not the ostentatious, at least the needful part of hospitality."

"And methinks," replied the Varangian, "O most Christian Count, that such of your high rank as, by choice or fate, become the guests of such as I, may think themselves pleased, and blame not their host's niggardliness, but the difficulty of his circumstances, if dinner should not present itself oftener than once in four-and-twenty hours." So saying, he clapped his hands together, and his domestic Edric entered. His guest looked astonished at the entrance of this third party into their retirement. "I will answer for this man," said Hereward, and addressed him in the following words: "What food hast thou, Edric, to place before the honourable Count?"

"Nothing but the cold pasty," replied the attendant, "marvellously damaged by your honour's encounter at breakfast."

The military domestic, as intimated, brought forward a large pasty, but which had already that morning sustained a furious attack, insomuch that Count Robert of Paris, who, like all noble Normans, was somewhat nice and delicate in his eating, was in some doubt whether his scrupulousness should not prevail over his hunger; but on looking more closely, sight, smell, and a fast of twenty hours joined to convince him that the pasty was an excellent one, and that the charger on which it was presented possessed corners yet untouched. At length, having suppressed his scruples, and made bold inroad upon

the remains of the dish, he paused to partake of a flask of strong red wine which stood invitingly beside him, and a lusty draught increased the good humour which had begun to take place towards Hereward, in exchange for the displeasure with which he had received him.

"Now, by Heaven!" he said, "I myself ought to be ashamed to lack the courtesy which I recommend to others! Here have I, with the manners of a Flemish boor, been devouring the provisions of my gallant host, without even asking him to sit down at his own table and to partake of his own good cheer!"

"I will not strain courtesies with you for that," said Hereward; and thrusting his hand into the pasty he proceeded with great speed and dexterity to devour the miscellaneous contents, a handful of which was enclosed in his grasp. The Count now withdrew from the table, partly in disgust at the rustic proceedings of Hereward, who, however, by now calling Edric to join him in his attack upon the pasty, showed that he had, in fact, according to his manners, subjected himself previously to some observance of respect towards his guest; while the assistance of his attendant enabled him to make a clear cacaabulum of what was left. Count Robert at length summoned up courage sufficient to put a question which had been trembling upon his lips ever since Hereward had returned.

"Have thine inquiries, my gallant friend, learned more concerning my unfortunate wife, my faithful Brenhilda?"

"Tidings I have," said the Anglo-Saxon," "but whether pleasing or not, yourself must be the judge. This much I have learned: she hath, as you know, come under an engagement to meet the Cæsar in arms in the lists, but under conditions which you may perhaps think strange; these, however, she hath entertained without scruple."

"Let me know these terms," said the Count of Paris; "they will, I think, appear less strange in my eyes than in thine."

But while he affected to speak with the utmost coolness, the husband's sparkling eye and crimsoned cheek betrayed the alteration which had taken place in his feelings. "The lady and the Cæsar," said Hereward, "as you partly heard yourself, are to meet in fight; if the Countess wins, of course she remains the wife of the noble Count of Paris; if she loses, she becomes the paramour of the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius."

"Saints and angels forbid!" said Count Robert; "were they to permit such treason to triumph, we might be pardoned for doubting their divinity!"

"Yet methinks," said the Anglo-Saxon, "it were no disgraceful precaution that both you and I, with other friends, if we can obtain such, should be seen under shield in the lists on the morning of the conflict. To triumph, or to be defeated, is in the hand of fate; but what we cannot fail to witness is, whether or not the lady receives that fair play which is the due of an honourable combatant, and which, as

you have yourself seen, can be sometimes basely transgressed in this Grecian Empire."

"On that condition," said the Count, "and protesting that not even the extreme danger of my lady shall make me break through the rule of a fair fight, I will surely attend the lists, if thou, brave Saxon, canst find me any means of doing so. Yet stay," he continued, after reflecting for a moment, "thou shalt promise not to let her know that her Count is on the field, far less to point him out to her eye among the press of warriors. Oh, thou dost not know that the sight of the beloved will sometimes steal from us our courage, even when it has most to achieve!"

"We will endeavour," said the Varangian, "to arrange matters according to thy pleasure, so that thou findest out no more fantastical difficulties; for, by my word, an affair so complicated in itself requires not to be confused by the fine-spun whims of thy national gallantry. Meantime, much must be done this night; and while I go about it, thou, Sir Knight, hadst best remain here, with such disguise of garments and such food as Edric may be able to procure for thee. Fear nothing from intrusion on the part of thy neighbours. We Varangians respect each other's secrets, of whatever nature they may chance to be."

CHAPTER XXI.

"But for our trusty brother-in-law—and the Abbot,
With all the rest of that consorted crew,—
Destruction straight shall dog them at the heels:—
Good uncle, help to order several powers
To Oxford, or where'er these traitors are:
They shall not live within this world, I swear."

Richard II.

AS Hereward spoke the last words narrated in the foregoing chapter, he left the Count in his apartment and proceeded to the Blacquernal Palace. We traced his first entrance into the court, but since then he had frequently been summoned, not only by order of the Princess Anna Comnena, who delighted in asking him questions concerning the customs of his native country, and marking down the replies in her own inflated language, but also by the direct command of the Emperor himself, who had the humour of many princes, that of desiring to obtain direct information from persons in a very inferior station in their court. The ring which the Princess had given to the Varangian, served as a pass-token more than once, and was now so generally known by the slaves of the palace, that Hereward had only to slip it into the hand of a principal person among them, and was introduced into a small chamber, not distant from the saloon already mentioned, dedicated to the Muses. In this small apartment, the Emperor, his spouse Irene, and their accomplished daughter Anna Comnena, were seated together, clad in very ordinary apparel, as indeed the furniture of the room itself

was of the kind used by respectable citizens, saving that mattresses, composed of eider-down, hung before each door to prevent the risk of eavesdropping.

"Our trusty Varangian," said the Empress.

"My guide and tutor respecting the manners of those steel-clad men," said the Princess Anna Comnena, "of whom it is so necessary that I should form an accurate idea."

"Your Imperial Majesty," said the Empress, "will not, I trust, think your consort and your muse-inspired daughter are too many to share with you the intelligence brought by this brave and loyal man?"

"Dearest wife and daughter," returned the Emperor, "I have hitherto spared you the burden of a painful secret, which I have locked in my own bosom, at whatever expense of solitary sorrow and unimparted anxiety. Noble daughter, you in particular will feel this calamity, learning, as you must learn, to think odiously of one, of whom it has hitherto been your duty to hold a very different opinion."

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed the Princess.

"Rally yourself," said the Emperor; "remember you are a child of the purple chamber, born, not to weep for your father's wrongs, but to avenge them,— not to regard even him who has lain by your side as half so important as the sacred imperial grandeur, of which you are yourself a partaker."

"What can such words preface?" said Anna Comnena, in great agitation.

"They say," answered the Emperor, "that the Cæsar is an ungrateful man to all my bounties, and even to that which annexed him to my own house and made him by adoption my own son. He hath consorted himself with a knot of traitors, whose very names are enough to raise the foul fiend, as if to snatch his assured prey!"

"Could Nicephorus do this?" said the astonished and forlorn Princess; "Nicephorus, who has so often called my eyes the lights by which he steered his path? Could he do this to my father, to whose exploits he has listened hour after hour, protesting that he knew not whether it was the beauty of the language, or the heroism of the action, which most enchanted him? Thinking with the same thought, seeing with the same eye, loving with the same heart—oh, my father! it is impossible that he could be so false. Think of the neighbouring Temple of the Muses!"

"And if I did," murmured Alexius in his heart, "I should think of the only apology which could be proposed for the traitor. A little is well enough, but the full soul loatheth the honey-comb." Then speaking aloud, "My daughter," he said, "be comforted; we ourselves were unwilling to believe the shameful truth; but our guards have been debauched; their commander, that ungrateful Achilles Tatius, with the equal traitor, Agelastes, have been seduced to favour our imprisonment or murder; and, alas for Greece! in the very moment

when she required the fostering care of a parent, she was to be deprived of him by a sudden and merciless blow!"

Here the Emperor wept, whether for the loss to be sustained by his subjects, or of his own life, it is hard to say.

"Methinks," said Irene, "your Imperial Highness is slow in taking measures against the danger."

"Under your gracious permission, mother," answered the Princess, "I would rather say he was hasty in giving belief to it. Methinks the evidence of a Varangian, granting him to be ever so stout a man-at-arms, is but a frail guarantee against the honour of your son-in-law—the approved bravery and fidelity of the captain of your guards—the deep sense, virtue, and profound wisdom of the greatest of your philosophers——"

"And the conceit of an over-educated daughter," said the Emperor, "who will not allow her parent to judge in what most concerns him. I will tell thee, Anna, I know every one of them, and the trust which may be reposed in them; the honour of your Nicephorus—the bravery and fidelity of the Acolyte—and the virtue and wisdom of Agelastes—have I not had them all in my purse? And had my purse continued well filled, and my arm strong as it was of late, there they would have still remained. But the butterflies went off as the weather became cold, and I must meet the tempest without their assistance. You talk of want of proof? I have proof sufficient when I see danger; this honest soldier brought me indications which corresponded with my own private remarks, made on purpose. Varangian he shall be of Varangians; Acolyte he shall be named, in place of the present traitor; and who knows what may come thereafter?"

"May it please your Highness," said the Varangian, who had been hitherto silent, "many men in this empire rise to dignity by the fall of their original patrons, but it is a road to greatness to which I cannot reconcile my conscience; moreover, having recovered a friend from whom I was long ago separated, I shall require, in short space, your imperial licence for going hence, where I shall leave thousands of enemies behind me, and, spending my life, like many of my countrymen, under the banner of King William of Scotland——"

"Part with *thee*, most inimitable man!" cried the Emperor with emphasis; "where shall I get a soldier—a champion—a friend—so faithful?"

"Noble sir," replied the Anglo-Saxon, "I am every way sensible to your goodness and munificence; but let me entreat you to call me by my own name, and to promise me nothing but your forgiveness, for my having been the agent of such confusion among your imperial servants. Not only is the threatened fate of Achilles Tatius, my benefactor; of the Cæsar, whom I think my well-wisher; and even of Agelastes himself, painful, so far as it is of my bringing round; but also I have known it somehow happen, that those on whom your

Imperial Majesty has lavished the most valuable expressions of your favour one day, were the next day food to fatten the chough and crow.

"She clutched the scroll as a falcon does his prey" (p. 258).

And this, I acknowledge, is a purpose for which I would not willingly have it said I had brought my English limbs to these Grecian shores."

"Call thee by thine own name, my Edward," said the Emperor

(while he muttered aside—"By Heaven, I have again forgotten the name of the barbarian!")—"by thine own name certainly for the present, but only until we shall devise one more fitted for the trust we repose in thee. Meantime, look at this scroll, which contains, I think, all the particulars which we have been able to learn of this plot, and give it to these unbelieving women, who will not credit that an Emperor is in danger, till the blades of the conspirators' poniards are clashing within his ribs."

Hereward did as he was commanded, and having looked at the scroll, and signified, by bending his head, his acquiescence in its contents, he presented it to Irene, who had not read long, ere, with a countenance so embittered that she had difficulty in pointing out the cause of her displeasure to her daughter, she bade her, with animation, "Read that—read that, and judge of the gratitude and affection of thy Cæsar!"

The Princess Anna Comnena awoke from a state of profound and overpowering melancholy, and looked at the passage pointed out to her, at first with an air of languid curiosity, which presently deepened into the most intense interest. She clutched the scroll as a falcon does his prey, her eye lightened with indignation; and it was with the cry of the bird when in fury that she exclaimed, "Bloody-minded, double-hearted traitor! what wouldst thou have? Yes, father," she said, rising in fury, "it is no longer the voice of a deceived princess that shall intercede to avert from the traitor Nicephorus the doom he has deserved! Did he think that one born in the purple chamber could be divorced—murdered perhaps—with the petty formula of the Romans, 'Restore the keys—be no longer my domestic drudge?'* Was a daughter of the blood of Comnenus liable to such insults as the meanest of Quirites might bestow on a family housekeeper!"

So saying, she dashed the tears from her eyes, and her countenance, naturally that of beauty and gentleness, became animated with the expression of a fury. Hereward looked at her with a mixture of fear, dislike, and compassion. She again burst forth, for nature having given her considerable abilities, had lent her at the same time an energy of passion far superior in power to the cold ambition of Irene, or the wily, ambidexter, shuffling policy of the Emperor.

"He shall abye it," said the Princess; "he shall dearly abye it! False, smiling, cozening traitor!—and for that unfeminine barbarian! Something of this I guessed even at that old fool's banqueting-house; and yet if this unworthy Cæsar submits his body to the chance of arms, he is less prudent than I have some reason to believe. Think you he will have the madness to brand us with such open neglect, my father? and will you not invent some mode of ensuring our revenge?"

"Soh!" thought the Emperor, "this difficulty is over; she will run down hill to her revenge, and will need the snaffle and curb more

* The Laconic form of the Roman divorce.

than the lash. If every jealous dame in Constantinople were to pursue her fury as unrelentingly, our laws should be written, like Draco's, not in ink, but in blood. Attend to me now," he said aloud, "my wife, my daughter, and thou, dear Edward, and you shall learn, and you three only, my mode of navigating the vessel of the state through these shoals.

"Let us see distinctly," continued Alexius, "the means by which they propose to act, and these shall instruct us how to meet them. A certain number of the Varangians are unhappily seduced, under pretence of wrongs, artfully stirred up by their villainous general. A part of them are studiously to be arranged nigh our person—the traitor Ursel, some of them suppose, is dead, but if it were so, his name is sufficient to draw together his old factionaries—I have a means of satisfying them on that point, on which I shall remain silent for the present. A considerable body of the Immortal guards have also given way to seduction; they are to be placed to support the handful of treacherous Varangians who are in the plot to attack our person.—Now, a slight change in the stations of the soldiery, which thou, my faithful Edward—or—a—a—whatever thou art named,—for which thou, I say, shalt have full authority, will derange the plans of the traitors, and place the true men in such position around them as to cut them to pieces with little trouble."

"And the combat, my lord?" said the Saxon.

"Thou hadst been no true Varangian hadst thou not inquired after that," said the Emperor, nodding good-humouredly towards him. "As to the combat, the Cæsar has devised it, and it shall be my care that he shall not retreat from the dangerous part of it. He cannot in honour avoid fighting with this woman, strange as the combat is; and however it ends, the conspiracy will break forth, and as assuredly as it comes against persons prepared, and in arms, shall it be stifled in the blood of the conspirators!"

"My revenge does not require this," said the Princess; "and your imperial honour is also interested that this Countess shall be protected."

"It is little business of mine," said the Emperor. "She comes here with her husband altogether uninvited. He behaves with insolence in my presence, and deserves whatever may be the issue to himself or his lady of their mad adventure. In sooth, I desired little more than to give him a fright with those animals whom their ignorance judged enchanted, and to give his wife a slight alarm about the impetuosity of a Grecian lover, and there my vengeance should have ended. But it may be that his wife may be taken under my protection, now that little revenge is over."

"And a paltry revenge it was," said the Empress, "that you, a man past middle life, and with a wife who might command some attention, should constitute yourself the object of alarm to such a handsome man as Count Robert, and the Amazon his wife."

"By your favour, dame Irene, no," said the Emperor. "I left that part of the proposed comedy to my son-in-law the Cæsar."

But when the poor Emperor had in some measure stopped one flood-gate, he effectually opened another, and one which was more formidable. "The more shame to your imperial wisdom, my father!" exclaimed the Princess Anna Comnena; "it is a shame, that with wisdom and a beard like yours, you should be meddling in such indecent follies as admit disturbance into private families, and that family your own daughter's! Who can say that the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius ever looked astray towards another woman than his wife, till the Emperor taught him to do so, and involved him in a web of intrigue and treachery, in which he has endangered the life of his father-in-law?"

"Daughter! daughter! daughter!"—said the Empress; "daughter of a she-wolf, I think, to goad her parent at such an unhappy time, when all the leisure he has is too little to defend his life!"

"Peace, I pray you, women both, with your senseless clamours," answered Alexius, "and let me at least swim for my life undisturbed with your folly. God knows if I am a man to encourage, I will not say the reality of wrong, but even its mere appearance."

These words he uttered, crossing himself, with a devout groan. His wife Irene, in the meantime, stepped before him and said, with a bitterness in her looks and accent, which only long-concealed nuptial hatred breaking forth at once could convey,—"Alexius, terminate this affair how it will, you have lived a hypocrite, and thou wilt not fail to die one." So saying, with an air of noble indignation, and carrying her daughter along with her, she swept out of the apartment.

The Emperor looked after her in some confusion. He soon, however, recovered his self-possession, and turning to Hereward, with a look of injured majesty, said, "Ah! my dear Edward"—for the word had become rooted in his mind, instead of the less euphonic name of Hereward—"thou seest how it is even with the greatest, and that the Emperor, in moments of difficulty, is a subject of misconstruction, as well as the meanest burgess of Constantinople; nevertheless, my trust is so great in thee, Edward, that I would have thee believe, that my daughter, Anna Comnena, is not of the temper of her mother, but rather of my own; honouring, thou mayst see, with religious fidelity, the unworthy ties which I hope soon to break, and assort her with other fetters of Cupid, which shall be borne more lightly. Edward, my main trust is in thee. Accident presents us with an opportunity, happy of the happiest so it be rightly improved, of having all the traitors before us assembled on one fair field. Think, *then*, on that day, as the Franks say at their tournaments, that fair eyes behold thee. Thou canst not devise a gift within my power, but I will gladly load thee with it."

"It needs not," said the Varangian, somewhat coldly; "my highest ambition is to merit the epitaph upon my tomb, 'Hereward was faithful.'"

I am about, however, to demand a proof of your imperial confidence, which, perhaps, you may think a startling one."

"Indeed!" said the Emperor. "What, in one word, is thy demand?"

"Permission," replied Hereward, "to go to the Duke of Bouillon's encampment, and entreat his presence in the lists, to witness this extraordinary combat."

"That he may return with his crusading madmen," said the Emperor, "and sack Constantinople, under pretence of doing justice to his confederates? This, Varangian, is at least speaking thy mind openly."

"No, by Heavens!" said Hereward suddenly; "the Duke of Bouillon shall come with no more knights than may be a reasonable guard, should treachery be offered to the Countess of Paris."

"Well, even in this," said the Emperor, "will I be conformable; and if thou, Edward, betrayest my trust, think that thou forfeitest all that my friendship has promised, and dost incur, besides, the damnation that is due to the traitor who betrays with a kiss."

"For thy reward, noble sir," answered the Varangian, "I hereby renounce all claim to it. When the diadem is once more firmly fixed upon thy brow, and the sceptre in thy hand, if I am then alive, if my poor services should deserve so much, I will petition thee for the means of leaving this court, and returning to the distant island in which I was born. Meanwhile, think me not unfaithful, because I have for a time the means of being so with effect. Your Imperial Highness shall learn that Hereward is as true as is your right hand to your left."—So saying, he took his leave with a profound obeisance.

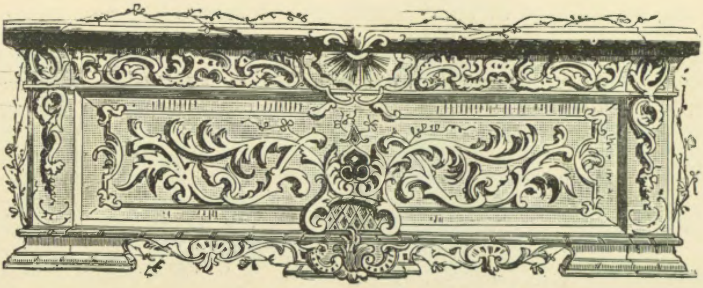
The Emperor gazed after him with a countenance in which doubt was mingled with admiration.

"I have trusted him," he said, "with all he asked, and with the power of ruining me entirely, if such be his purpose. He has but to breathe a whisper, and the whole mad crew of crusaders, kept in humour at the expense of so much current falsehood, and so much more gold, will return with fire and sword to burn down Constantinople, and sow with salt the place where it stood. I have done what I had resolved never to do—I have ventured kingdom and life on the faith of a man born of woman. How often have I said, nay, sworn, that I would not hazard myself on such peril, and yet, step by step, I have done so! I cannot tell—there is in that man's looks and words a good faith which overwhelms me; and, what is almost incredible, my belief in him has increased in proportion to his showing me how slight my power was over him. I threw, like the wily angler, every bait I could devise, and some of them such as a king would scarcely have disdained; to none of these would he rise; but yet he gorges, I may say, the bare hook, and enters upon my service without a shadow of self-interest.—Can this be double-distilled treachery?—or can it

be what men call disinterestedness?—If I thought him false, the moment is not yet past—he has not yet crossed the bridge—he has not passed the guards of the palace, who have no hesitation, and know no disobedience.—But no—I were then alone in the land, and without a friend or confidant.—I hear the sound of the outer gate unclose, the sense of danger certainly renders my ears more acute than usual.—It shuts again—the die is cast. He is at liberty—and Alexius Comnenus must stand or fall, according to the uncertain faith of a mercenary Varangian." He clapped his hands; a slave appeared, of whom he demanded wine. He drank, and his heart was cheered within him. "I am decided," he said, "and will abide with resolution the cast of the throw, for good or for evil."

So saying, he retired to his apartment, and was not again seen during that night.

A. DE RICHEMONT.



CHAPTER XXII.

"And aye, as if for death, some lonely trumpet peal'd."

CAMPBELL.

THE Varangian, his head agitated with the weighty matters which were imposed on him, stopped from time to time as he journeyed through the moonlight streets, to arrest passing ideas as they shot through his mind, and consider them with accuracy in all their bearings. His thoughts were such as animated or alarmed him alternately, each followed by a confused throng of accompaniments which it suggested, and banished again in its turn by reflections of another description. It was one of those conjunctures when the minds of ordinary men feel themselves unable to support a burden which is suddenly flung upon them, and when, on the contrary, those of uncommon fortitude, and that best of Heaven's gifts, good sense, founded on presence of mind, feel their talents awakened and regulated for the occasion, like a good steed under the management of a rider of courage and experience.

As he stood in one of those fits of reverie, which repeatedly during that night arrested his stern military march, Hereward thought that his ear caught the note of a distant trumpet. This surprised him; a trumpet blown at that late hour, and in the streets of Constantinople, argued something extraordinary; for as all military movements were the subject of special ordinance, the etiquette of the night could hardly have been transgressed without some great cause. The question was, what that cause could be?

Had the insurrection broken out unexpectedly, and in a different manner from what the conspirators proposed to themselves? If so, his meeting with his plighted bride, after so many years' absence, was

but a delusive preface to their separating for ever. Or had the crusaders, a race of men upon whose motions it was difficult to calculate, suddenly taken arms and returned from the opposite shore, to surprise the city? This might very possibly be the case; so numerous had been the different causes of complaint afforded to the crusaders, that when they were now for the first time assembled into one body, and had heard the stories which they could reciprocally tell concerning the perfidy of the Greeks, nothing was so likely, so natural, even perhaps so justifiable, as that they should study revenge.

But the sound rather resembled a point of war regularly blown, than the tumultuous blare of bugle-horns and trumpets, the accompaniments at once, and the annunciation, of a taken town, in which the horrid circumstances of storm had not yet given place to such stern peace as the victor's weariness of slaughter and rapine allows at length to the wretched inhabitants. Whatever it was, it was necessary that Hereward should learn its purport, and therefore he made his way into a broad street near the barracks, from which the sound seemed to come, to which point, indeed, his way was directed for other reasons.

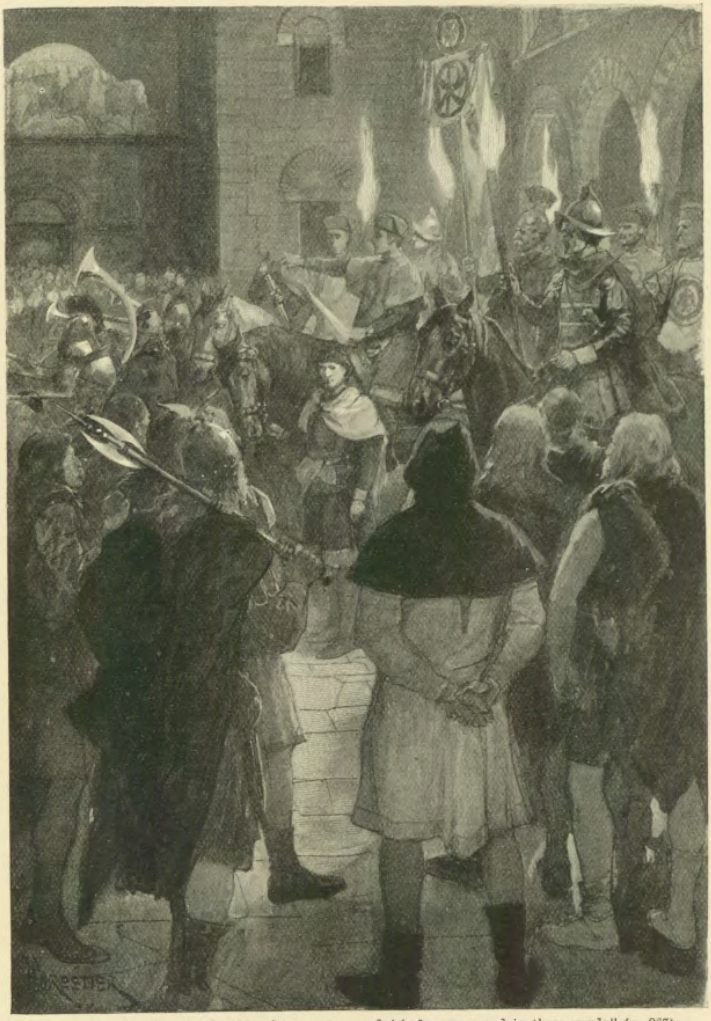
The inhabitants of that quarter of the town did not appear violently startled by this military signal. The moonlight slept on the street, crossed by the gigantic shadowy towers of Sancta Sophia. No human being appeared in the streets, and such as for an instant looked from their doors or from their lattices, seemed to have their curiosity quickly satisfied, for they withdrew their heads, and secured the opening through which they had peeped.

Hereward could not help remembering the traditions which were recounted by the fathers of his tribe, in the deep woods of Hampshire, and which spoke of invisible huntsmen, who were heard to follow with viewless horses and hounds the unseen chase through the depths of the forests of Germany. Such it seemed were the sounds with which these haunted woods were wont to ring while the wild chase was up; and with such apparent terror did the hearers listen to their clamour.

"Fie!" he said, as he suppressed within him a tendency to the same superstitious fears; "do such childish fancies belong to a man trusted with so much and from whom so much is expected?" He paced down the street, therefore, with his battle-axe over his shoulder, and the first person whom he saw venturing to look out of his door, he questioned concerning the cause of this military music at such an unaccustomed hour.

"I cannot tell, so please you, my lord," said the citizen, unwilling, it appeared, to remain in the open air, or to enter into conversation, and greatly disposed to decline further questioning. This was the political citizen of Constantinople, whom we met with at the beginning of this history, and who, hastily stepping into his habitation, eschewed all further conversation.

The wrestler Stephanos showed himself at the next door, which



"The herald, after the flourish of trumpets was finished, commenced in these words" (p 267).

was garlanded with oak and ivy leaves, in honour of some recent victory. He stood unshrinking, partly encouraged by the consciousness of personal strength, and partly by a rugged surliness of temper, which is often mistaken among persons of this kind for real courage. His admirer and flatterer, Lysimachus, kept himself ensconced behind his ample shoulders.

As Hereward passed he put the same question as he did to the former citizen,—"Know you the meaning of these trumpets sounding so late?"

"You should know best yourself," answered Stephanos doggedly; "for, to judge by your axe and helmet, they are your trumpets, and not ours, which disturb honest men in their first sleep."

"Varlet!" answered the Varangian, with an emphasis which made the prizer start,—"but—when that trumpet sounds, it is no time for a soldier to punish insolence as it deserves."

The Greek started back and bolted into his house, nearly overthrowing in the speed of his retreat the artist Lysimachus, who was listening to what passed.

Hereward passed on to the barracks, where the military music had seemed to halt; but on the Varangian crossing the threshold of the ample courtyard, it broke forth again with a tremendous burst, whose clangour almost stunned him, though well accustomed to the sounds. "What is the meaning of this, Engelbrecht?" he said to the Varangian sentinel, who paced axe in hand before the entrance.

"The proclamation of a challenge and combat," answered Engelbrecht. "Strange things toward, comrade; the frantic crusaders have bit the Grecians, and infected them with their humour of tilting, as they say dogs do each other with madness."

Hereward made no reply to the sentinel's speech, but pressed forward into a knot of his fellow-soldiers who were assembled in the court, half-armed, or, more properly, in total disarray, as just arisen from their beds, and huddled around the trumpets of their corps, which were drawn out in full pomp. He of the gigantic instrument, whose duty it was to intimate the express commands of the Emperor, was not wanting in his place, and the musicians were supported by a band of the Varangians in arms, headed by Achilles Tatius himself. Hereward could also notice, on approaching nearer, as his comrades made way for him, that six of the imperial heralds were on duty on this occasion; four of these (two acting at the same time) had already made proclamation, which was to be repeated for the third time by the two last, as was the usual fashion in Constantinople with imperial mandates of great consequence. Achilles Tatius, the moment he saw his confidant, made him a sign, which Hereward understood as conveying a desire to speak with him after the proclamation was over. The herald, after the flourish of trumpets was finished, commenced in these words:

"By the authority of the resplendent and divine Prince Alexius Comnenus, Emperor of the most holy Roman Empire, his Imperial Majesty desires it to be made known to all and sundry the subjects of his empire, whatever their race of blood may be, or at whatever shrine of divinity they happen to bend—Know ye, therefore, that upon the second day after this is dated, our beloved son-in-law, the much-esteemed Cæsar, hath taken upon him to do battle with our sworn enemy, Robert, Count of Paris, on account of his insolent conduct, by presuming publicly to occupy our royal seat, and no less by breaking, in our imperial presence, those curious specimens of art, ornamenting our throne, called by tradition the Lions of Solomon. And that there may not remain a man in Europe who shall dare to say that the Grecians are behind other parts of the world in any of the manly exercises which Christian nations use, the said noble enemies, renouncing all assistance from falsehood, from spells, or from magic, shall debate this quarrel in three courses with grinded spears, and three passages of arms with sharpened swords; the field to be at the judgment of the honourable Emperor, and to be decided at his most gracious and unerring pleasure. And so God show the right!"

Another formidable flourish of the trumpets concluded the ceremony. Achilles then dismissed the attendant troops, as well as the heralds and musicians, to their respective quarters; and having got Hereward close to his side, inquired of him whether he had learned anything of the prisoner, Robert, Count of Paris.

"Nothing," said the Varangian, "save the tidings your proclamation contains."

"You think, then," said Achilles, "that the Count has been a party to it?"

"He ought to have been so," answered the Varangian. "I know no one but himself entitled to take burden for his appearance in the lists."

"Why, look you," said the Acolyte, "my most excellent, though blunt-witted Hereward, this Cæsar of ours hath had the extravagance to venture his tender wit in comparison to that of Achilles Tatius. He stands upon his honour too, this ineffable fool, and is displeased with the idea of being supposed either to challenge a woman, or to receive a challenge at her hand. He has substituted, therefore, the name of the lord instead of the lady. If the Count fail to appear, the Cæsar walks forward challenger and successful combatant at a cheap rate, since no one has encountered him, and claims that the lady should be delivered up to him as captive of his dreaded bow and spear. This will be the signal for a general tumult, in which, if the Emperor be not slain on the spot, he will be conveyed to the dungeon of his own Blacquernal, there to endure the doom which his cruelty has inflicted upon so many others."

"But——" said the Varangian.

"But—but—but," said his officer; "but thou art a fool. Canst

thou not see that this gallant Cæsar is willing to avoid the risk of encountering with this lady, while he earnestly desires to be supposed willing to meet her husband? It is our business to fix the combat in such a shape as to bring all who are prepared for insurrection together in arms to play their parts. Do thou only see that our trusty friends are placed near to the Emperor's person, and in such a manner as to keep from him the officious and meddling portion of guards, who may be disposed to assist him; and whether the Cæsar fights a combat with lord or lady, or whether there be any combat at all or not, the revolution shall be accomplished, and the Tatii shall replace the Comneni upon the imperial throne of Constantinople. Go, my trusty Hereward. Thou wilt not forget that the signal word of the insurrection is Ursel, who lives in the affections of the people, although his body, it is said, has long lain a corpse in the dungeons of the Blacquernal."

"What was this Ursel," said Hereward, "of whom I hear men talk so variously?"

"A competitor for the crown with Alexius Comnenus—good, brave, and honest; but overpowered by the cunning, rather than the skill or bravery of his foe. He died, as I believe, in the Blacquernal; though when, or how, there are few that can say. But, up and be doing, my Hereward! Speak encouragement to the Varangians—interest whomsoever thou canst to join us. Of the Immortals, as they are called, and of the discontented citizens, enough are prepared to fill up the cry, and follow in the wake of those on whom we must rely as the beginners of the enterprise. No longer shall Alexius's cunning, in avoiding popular assemblies, avail to protect him; he cannot, with regard to his honour, avoid being present at a combat to be fought beneath his own eye; and Mercury be praised for the eloquence which inspired him, after some hesitation, to determine for the proclamation!"

"You have seen him, then, this evening?" said the Varangian.

"Seen him! Unquestionably," answered the Acolyte. "Had I ordered these trumpets to be sounded without his knowledge the blast had blown the head from my shoulders."

"I had well-nigh met you at the palace," said Hereward; while his heart throbbed almost as high as if he had actually had such a dangerous encounter.

"I heard something of it," said Achilles; "that you came to take the parting orders of him who now acts the sovereign. Surely, had I seen you there, with that steadfast, open, seemingly honest countenance, cheating the wily Greek by very dint of bluntness, I had not forborne laughing at the contrast between that and the thoughts of thy heart."

"God alone," said Hereward, "knows the thoughts of our hearts; but I take Him to witness, that I am faithful to my promise, and will discharge the task entrusted to me."

"Bravo! mine honest Anglo-Saxon," said Achilles. "I pray thee

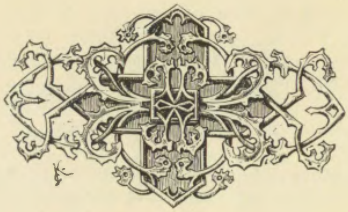
to call my slaves to unarm me; and when thou thyself doffest those weapons of an ordinary lifeguard's-man, tell them they never shall above twice more enclose the limbs of one for whom fate has much more fitting garments in store."

Hereward dared not entrust his voice with an answer to so critical a speech; he bowed profoundly, and retired to his own quarters in the building.

Upon entering the apartment, he was immediately saluted by the voice of Count Robert, in joyful accents, not suppressed by the fear of making himself heard, though prudence should have made that uppermost in his mind.

"Hast thou heard it, my dear Hereward," he said—"hast thou heard the proclamation, by which this Greek antelope hath defied me to tilting with grinded spears, and fighting three passages of arms with sharpened swords? Yet there is something strange, too, that he should not think it safer to hold my lady to the encounter? He may think, perhaps, that the crusaders would not permit such a battle to be fought. But, by our Lady of the Broken Lances! he little knows that the men of the West hold their ladies' character for courage as jealously as they do their own. This whole night have I been considering in what armour I shall clothe me; what shift I shall make for a steed; and whether I shall not honour him sufficiently by using Tranchefer, as my only weapon, against his whole armour, offensive and defensive."

"I shall take care, however," said Hereward, "that thou art better provided in case of need.—Thou knowest not the Greeks."



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE Varangian did not leave the Count of Paris until the latter had placed in his hands his signet-ring, *semée* (as the heralds express it), *with lances splintered*, and bearing the proud motto, "Mine yet unscathed." Provided with this symbol of confidence, it was now his business to take order for communicating the approaching solemnity to the leader of the crusading army, and demanding for him, in the name of Robert of Paris, and the Lady Brenhilda, such a detachment of Western cavaliers as might ensure strict observance of honour and honesty in the arrangement of the lists, and during the progress of the combat. The duties imposed on Hereward were such as to render it impossible for him to proceed personally to the camp of Godfrey; and though there were many of the Varangians in whose fidelity he could have trusted, he knew of none among those under his immediate command whose intelligence, on so novel an occasion, might be entirely depended on. In this perplexity he strolled, perhaps without well knowing why, to the gardens of Agelastes, where fortune once more produced him an interview with Bertha.

No sooner had Hereward made her aware of his difficulty, than the faithful bower-maiden's resolution was taken.

"I see," said she, "that the peril of this part of the adventure must rest with me; and wherefore should it not? My mistress, in the bosom of prosperity, offered herself to go forth into the wide world for my sake; I will for hers go to the camp of this Frankish lord. He is an honourable man, and a pious Christian, and his followers are

faithful pilgrims. A woman can have nothing to fear who goes to such men upon such an errand."

The Varangian, however, was too well acquainted with the manners of camps to permit the fair Bertha to go alone. He provided, therefore, for her safeguard a trusty old soldier, bound to his person by long kindness and confidence; and having thoroughly possessed her of the particulars of the message she was to deliver, and desired her to be in readiness without the enclosure at peep of dawn, returned once more to his barracks.

With the earliest light, Hereward was again at the spot where he had parted overnight with Bertha, accompanied by the honest soldier to whose care he meant to confide her. In a short time, he had seen them safely on board of a ferry-boat lying in the harbour; the master of which readily admitted them, after some examination of their license, to pass to Scutari, which was forged in the name of the Acolyte, as authorised by that foul conspirator, and which agreed with the appearance of old Osmund and his young charge.

The morning was lovely; and erelong the town of Scutari opened on the view of the travellers, glittering, as now, with a variety of architecture, which, though it might be termed fantastical, could not be denied the praise of beauty. These buildings rose boldly out of a thick grove of cypresses, and other huge trees, the larger, probably, as they were respected for filling the cemeteries, and being the guardians of the dead.

At the period we mention, another circumstance, no less striking than beautiful, rendered doubly interesting a scene which must have been at all times greatly so. A large portion of that miscellaneous army, which came to regain the holy places of Palestine, and the blessed Sepulchre itself, from the infidels, had established themselves in a camp within a mile, or thereabouts, of Scutari. Although, therefore, the crusaders were destitute in a great measure of the use of tents, the army (excepting the pavilions of some leaders of high rank) had constructed for themselves temporary huts, not unpleasing to the eye, being decorated with leaves and flowers, while the tall pennons and banners that floated over them with various devices, showed that the flower of Europe were assembled at that place. A loud and varied murmur, resembling that of a thronged hive, floated from the camp of the crusaders to the neighbouring town of Scutari, and every now and then the deep tone was broken by some shriller sound, the note of some musical instrument, or the treble scream of some child or female, in fear or in gaiety.

The party at length landed in safety; and as they approached one of the gates of the camp, there sallied forth a brisk array of gallant cavaliers, pages, and squires, exercising their masters' horses or their own. From the noise they made, conversing at the very top of their voices, galloping, curvetting, and prancing their palfreys, it seemed

as if their early discipline had called them to exercise ere the fumes of last night's revel were thoroughly dissipated by repose. So soon as they saw Bertha and her party, they approached them with cries which marked their country was Italy—"Al'erta! al'erta!—Roba de guadagno, cameradi!"*

They gathered round the Anglo-Saxon maiden and her companions, repeating their cries in a manner which made Bertha tremble. Their general demand was, "What was her business in their camp?"

"I would to the General-in-chief, cavaliers," answered Bertha, "having a secret message to his ear."

"For whose ear?" said a leader of the party, a handsome youth of about eighteen years of age, who seemed either to have a sounder brain than his fellows, or to have overflowed it with less wine. "Which of our leaders do you come hither to see?" he demanded.

"Godfrey of Bouillon."

"Indeed!" said the page who had spoken first; "can nothing of less consequence serve thy turn? Take a look amongst us; young are we all, and reasonably wealthy. My Lord of Bouillon is old, and if he has any sequins, he is not like to lavish them in this way."

"Still I have a token to Godfrey of Bouillon," answered Bertha, "an assured one; and he will little thank any who obstructs my free passage to him;" and therewithal showing a little case, in which the signet of the Count of Paris was enclosed, "I will trust it in your hands," she said, "if you promise not to open it, but to give me free access to the noble leader of the crusaders."

"I will," said the youth, "and if such be the Duke's pleasure, thou shalt be admitted to him."

"Ernest the Apulian, thy dainty Italian wit is caught in a trap," said one of his companions.

"Thou art an ultramontane fool, Polydore," returned Ernest; "there may be more in this than either thy wit or mine is able to fathom. This maiden and one of her attendants wear a dress belonging to the Varangian Imperial Guard. They have perhaps been entrusted with a message from the Emperor, and it is not irreconcilable with Alexius's politics to send it through such messengers as these. Let us, therefore, convey them in all honour to the General's tent."

"With all my heart," said Polydore. "A blue-eyed wench is a pretty thing, but I like not the sauce of the camp-marshal, nor his taste in attiring men who give way to temptation.† Yet, ere I prove a fool like my companion, I would ask who or what this pretty maiden is, who comes to put noble princes and holy pilgrims in mind that they have in their time had the follies of men?"

* That is—"Take heed! take heed!—there is booty, comrades!"

† Persons among the crusaders found guilty of certain offences, did penance in a dress of tar and feathers, though it is supposed a punishment of modern invention.

Bertha advanced and whispered in the ear of Ernest. Meantime joke followed jest, among Polydore and the rest of the gay youths, in riotous and ribald succession, which, however characteristic of the rude speakers, may as well be omitted here. Their effect was to shake in some degree the fortitude of the Saxon maiden, who had some difficulty in mustering courage to address them. "As you have mothers, gentlemen," she said, "as you have fair sisters, whom you would protect from dishonour with your best blood—as you love and honour those holy places which you are sworn to free from the infidel enemy, have compassion on me, that you may merit success in your undertaking!"

"Fear nothing, maiden," said Ernest, "I will be your protector; and you, my comrades, be ruled by me. I have, during your brawling, taken a view, though somewhat against my promise, of the pledge which she bears, and if she who presents it is affronted or maltreated, be assured Godfrey of Bouillon will severely avenge the wrong done her."

"Nay, comrade, if thou canst warrant us so much," said Polydore, "I will myself be most anxious to conduct the young woman in honour and safety to Sir Godfrey's tent."

"The Princes," said Ernest, "must be nigh meeting there in council. What I have said I will warrant and uphold with hand and life. More I might guess, but I conclude this sensible young maiden can speak for herself."

"Now, Heaven bless thee, gallant squire," said Bertha, "and make thee alike brave and fortunate! Embarrass yourself no farther about me than to deliver me safe to your leader, Godfrey."

"We spend time," said Ernest, springing from his horse. "You are no soft Eastern, fair maid, and I presume you will find yourself under no difficulty in managing a quiet horse?"

"Not the least," said Bertha, as, wrapping herself in her cassock, she sprang from the ground, and alighted upon the spirited palfrey, as a linnet stoops upon a rose-bush. "And now, sir, as my business really brooks no delay, I will be indebted to you to show me instantly to the tent of Duke Godfrey of Bouillon."

By availing herself of this courtesy of the young Apulian, Bertha imprudently separated herself from the old Varangian; but the intentions of the youth were honourable, and he conducted her through the tents and huts to the pavilion of the celebrated General-in-chief of the Crusade.

"Here," he said, "you must tarry for a space, under the guardianship of my companions" (for two or three of the pages had accompanied them, out of curiosity to see the issue), "and I will take the commands of the Duke of Bouillon upon the subject."

To this nothing could be objected, and Bertha had nothing better to do than to admire the outside of the tent, which, in one of Alexius's fits of generosity and munificence, had been presented by the Greek Emperor to the Chief of the Franks. It was raised upon tall spear-

shaped poles, which had the semblance of gold; its curtains were of a thick stuff, manufactured of silk, cotton, and gold thread. The warders who stood round were (at least during the time that the council was held) old, grave men, the personal squires of the body, most of them, of the sovereigns who had taken the Cross, and who could, therefore, be trusted as a guard over the assembly, without danger of their blabbing what they might overhear. Their appearance was serious and considerate, and they looked like men who had taken upon them the Cross, not as an idle adventure of arms, but as a purpose of

"She placed in his hands the signet which had been restored to her by the young page" (p. 276).

the most solemn and serious nature. One of these stopped the Italian, and demanded what business authorised him to press forward into the council of the crusaders, who were already taking their seats. The page answered by giving his name, "Ernest of Otranto, page of Prince Tancred"; and stated that he announced a young woman, who bore a token to the Duke of Bouillon, adding that it was accompanied by a message for his own ear.

Bertha, meantime, laid aside her mantle, or upper garment, and disposed the rest of her dress according to the Anglo-Saxon costume.

She had hardly completed this task before the page of Prince Tancred returned to conduct her into the presence of the council of the crusade. She followed his signal; while the other young men who had accompanied her, wondering at the apparent ease with which she gained admittance, drew back to a respectful distance from the tent, and there canvassed the singularity of their morning's adventure.

In the meanwhile, the ambassadress herself entered the council chamber, exhibiting an agreeable mixture of shamefacedness and reserve, together with a bold determination to do her duty at all events. There were about fifteen of the principal crusaders assembled in council, with their chieftain Godfrey. He himself was a tall, strong man, arrived at that period of life in which men are supposed to have lost none of their resolution, while they have acquired a wisdom and circumspection unknown to their earlier years. The countenance of Godfrey bespoke both prudence and boldness, and resembled his hair, where a few threads of silver were already mingled with his raven locks.

Tancred, the noblest knight of the Christian chivalry, sat at no great distance from him with Hugh, Earl of Vermandois, generally called the Great Count, the selfish and wily Bohemond, the powerful Raymond of Provence, and others of the principal crusaders, all more or less completely sheathed in armour.

Bertha did not allow her courage to be broken down, but advancing with a timid grace towards Godfrey, she placed in his hands the signet which had been restored to her by the young page, and after a deep obeisance, spoke these words: "Godfrey, Count of Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine the Lower, Chief of the Holy Enterprise called the Crusade, and you, his gallant comrades, peers, and companions, by whatever titles you may be honoured, I, an humble maiden of England, daughter of Engelred, originally a franklin of Hampshire, and since Chieftain of the Foresters, or free Anglo-Saxons, under the command of the celebrated Edric, do claim what credence is due to the bearer of the true pledge which I put into your hand, on the part of one not the least considerable of your own body, Count Robert of Paris——"

"Our most honourable confederate," said Godfrey, looking at the ring. "Most of you, my lords, must, I think, know this signet—a field sown with the fragments of many splintered lances." The signet was handed from one of the assembly to another, and generally recognised.

When Godfrey had signified so much, the maiden resumed her message. "To all true crusaders, therefore, comrades of Godfrey of Bouillon, and especially to the Duke himself,—to all, I say, excepting Bohemond of Tarentum, whom he counts unworthy of his notice——"

"Hah! me unworthy of his notice," said Bohemond. "What mean you by that, damsel?—But the Count of Paris shall answer it to me."

"Under your favour, Sir Bohemond," said Godfrey, "no. Our articles renounce the sending of challenges among ourselves, and the matter, if not dropped betwixt the parties, must be referred to the voice of this honourable council."

"I think I guess the business now, my lord," said Bohemond. "The Count of Paris is disposed to turn and tear me, because I offered him good counsel on the evening before we left Constantinople, when he neglected to accept or be guided by it——"

"It will be the more easily explained when we have heard his message," said Godfrey.—"Speak forth Lord Robert of Paris's charge, damsel, that we may take some order with that which now seems a perplexed business."

Bertha resumed her message; and, having briefly narrated the recent events, thus concluded:—"The battle is to be done to-morrow, about two hours after daybreak, and the Count entreats of the noble Duke of Lorraine that he will permit some fifty of the lances of France to attend the deed of arms, and secure that fair and honourable conduct, which he has otherwise some doubts of receiving at the hands of his adversary. Or if any young and gallant knight should, of his own free will, wish to view the said combat, the Count will feel his presence as an honour; always he desires that the name of such knight be numbered carefully with the armed crusaders who shall attend in the lists, and that the whole shall be limited, by Duke Godfrey's own inspection, to fifty lances only, which are enough to obtain the protection required, while more would be considered as a preparation for aggression upon the Grecians, and occasion the revival of disputes which are now happily at rest."

Bertha had no sooner finished delivering her manifesto, and made with great grace her obeisance to the council, than a sort of whisper took place in the assembly, which soon assumed a more lively tone.

Their solemn vow not to turn their back upon Palestine, now that they had set their hands to the plough, was strongly urged by some of the elder knights of the council, and two or three high prelates, who had by this time entered to take share in the deliberations. The young knights, on the other hand, were fired with indignation on hearing the manner in which their comrade had been trepanned; and few of them could think of missing a combat in the lists in a country in which such sights were so rare, and where one was to be fought so near them.

Godfrey rested his brow on his hand, and seemed in great perplexity. To break with the Greeks, after having suffered so many injuries in order to maintain the advantage of keeping the peace with them, seemed very impolitic, and a sacrifice of all he had obtained by a long course of painful forbearance towards Alexius Comnenus. On the other hand, he was bound as a man of honour to resent the injury offered to Count Robert of Paris, whose reckless spirit of chivalry made him the darling of the army. It was the cause, too, of a beautiful lady,

and a brave one: every knight in the host would think himself bound, by his vow, to hasten to her defence. When Godfrey spoke, it was to complain of the difficulty of the determination, and the short time there was to consider the case.

"With submission to my Lord Duke of Lorraine," said Tancred, "I was a knight ere I was a crusader, and took on me the vows of chivalry ere I placed this blessed sign upon my shoulder; the vow first made must be first discharged. I will therefore do penance for neglecting, for a space, the obligations of the second vow, while I observe that which recalls me to the first duty of knighthood,—the relief of a distressed lady in the hands of men whose conduct towards her, and towards this host, in every respect entitles me to call them treacherous faitours."

"If my kinsman Tancred," said Bohemond, "will check his impetuosity, and you, my lords, will listen, as you have sometimes deigned to do, to my advice, I think I can direct you how to keep clear of any breach of your oath, and yet fully to relieve our distressed fellow-pilgrims. I see some suspicious looks are cast towards me, which are caused perhaps by the churlish manner in which this violent, and, in this case, almost insane young warrior, has protested against receiving my assistance. My great offence is the having given him warning, by precept and example, of the treachery which was about to be practised against him, and instructed him to use forbearance and temperance. My warning he altogether contemned—my example he neglected to follow, and fell into the snare which was spread, as it were, before his very eyes. Yet the Count of Paris, in rashly contemning me, has acted only from a temper which misfortune and disappointment have rendered irrational and frantic. I am so far from bearing him ill-will, that, with your lordship's permission, and that of the present council, I will haste to the place of rendezvous with fifty lances, making up the retinue which attends upon each to at least ten men, which will make the stipulated auxiliary force equal to five hundred; and with these I can have little doubt of rescuing the Count and his lady."

"Nobly proposed," said the Duke of Bouillon; "and with a charitable forgiveness of injuries which becomes our Christian expedition. But thou hast forgot the main difficulty, brother Bohemond, that we are sworn never to turn back upon the sacred journey."

"If we can elude that oath upon the present occasion," said Bohemond, "it becomes our duty to do so. Are we such bad horsemen, or are our steeds so awkward, that we cannot rein them back from this to the landing-place at Scutari? We can get them on shipboard in the same retrograde manner, and when we arrive in Europe, where our vow binds us no longer, the Count and Countess of Paris are rescued, and our vow remains entire in the Chancery of Heaven."

A general shout arose—"Long life to the gallant Bohemond! Shame to us if we do not fly to the assistance of so valiant a knight,

and a lady so lovely, since we can do so without breach of our vow."

"The question," said Godfrey, "appears to me to be eluded rather than solved; yet such evasions have been admitted by the most learned and scrupulous clerks; nor do I hesitate to admit of Bohemond's expedient, any more than if the enemy had attacked our rear, which might have occasioned our countermarching to be a case of absolute necessity."

Some there were in the assembly, particularly the Churchmen, inclined to think that the oath by which the crusaders had solemnly bound themselves ought to be as literally obeyed. But Peter the Hermit, who had a place in the council, and possessed great weight, declared it as his opinion, "That since the precise observance of their vow would tend to diminish the forces of the crusade, it was in fact unlawful, and should not be kept according to the literal meaning, if, by a fair construction, it could be eluded."

He offered himself to back the animal which he bestrode—that is, his ass; and though he was diverted from showing this example by the remonstrances of Godfrey of Bouillon, who was afraid of his becoming a scandal in the eyes of the heathen, yet he so prevailed by his arguments, that the knights, far from scrupling to countermarch, eagerly contended which should have the honour of making one of the party which should retrograde to Constantinople, see the combat, and bring back to the host in safety the valorous Count of Paris, of whose victory no one doubted, and his Amazonian Countess.

This emulation was also put an end to by the authority of Godfrey, who himself selected the fifty knights who were to compose the party. They were chosen from different nations, and the command of the whole was given to young Tancred of Otranto. Notwithstanding the claim of Bohemond, Godfrey detained the latter, under the pretext that his knowledge of the country and people was absolutely necessary to enable the council to form the plan of the campaign in Syria; but in reality he dreaded the selfishness of a man of great ingenuity as well as military skill, who, finding himself in a separate command, might be tempted, should opportunities arise, to enlarge his own power and dominion, at the expense of the pious purposes of the crusade in general. The younger men of the expedition were chiefly anxious to procure such horses as had been thoroughly trained, and could go through with ease and temper the manœuvre of equitation, by which it was designed to render legitimate the movement which they had recourse to. The selection was at length made, and the detachment ordered to draw up in the rear, or upon the eastward line of the Christian encampment. In the meanwhile, Godfrey charged Bertha with a message for the Count of Paris, in which, slightly censuring him for not observing more caution in his intercourse with the Greeks, he informed him that he had sent a detachment of fifty lances, with

the corresponding squires, pages, men-at-arms, and crossbows, five hundred in number, commanded by the valiant Tancred, to his assistance. The Duke also informed him that he had added a suit of armour of the best temper Milan could afford, together with a trusty war-horse, which he entreated him to use upon the field of battle; for Bertha had not omitted to intimate Count Robert's want of the means of knightly equipment. The horse was brought before the pavilion accordingly, completely barbed or armed in steel, and laden with armour for the knight's body. Godfrey himself put the bridle into Bertha's hand.

"Thou need'st not fear to trust thyself with this steed; he is as gentle and docile as he is fleet and brave. Place thyself on his back, and take heed thou stir not from the side of the noble Prince Tancred of Otranto, who will be the faithful defender of a maiden that has this day shown dexterity, courage, and fidelity."

Bertha bowed low, as her cheeks glowed at praise from one whose talents and worth were in such general esteem, as to have raised him to the distinguished situation of leader of a host which numbered in it the bravest and most distinguished captains of Christendom.

"Who are yon two persons?" continued Godfrey, speaking of the companions of Bertha, whom he saw in the distance before the tent.

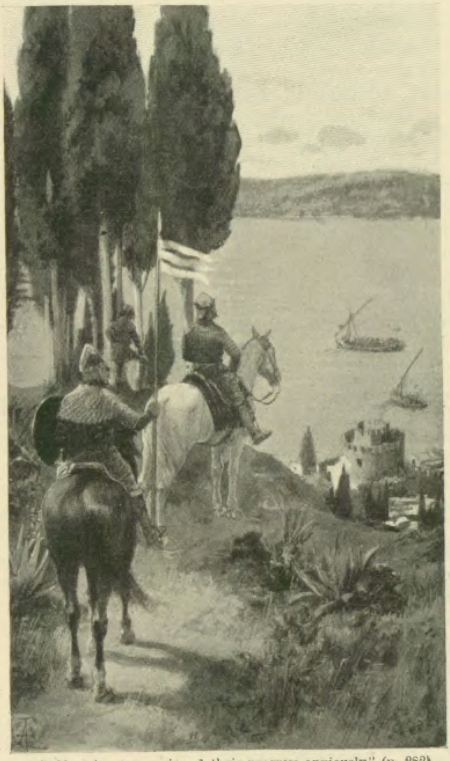
"The one," answered the damsel, "is the master of the ferry-boat which brought me over; and the other, an old Varangian who came hither as my protector."

"As they may come to employ their eyes here, and their tongues on the opposite side," returned the general of the crusaders, "I do not think it prudent to let them accompany you. They shall remain here for some short time. The citizens of Scutari will not comprehend for some space what our intention is, and I could wish Prince Tancred and his attendants to be the first to announce their own arrival."

Bertha accordingly intimated the pleasure of the French general to the parties, without naming his motives; when the ferryman began to exclaim on the hardship of intercepting him in his trade, and Osmund to complain of being detained from his duties. But Bertha, by the orders of Godfrey, left them, with the assurance that they would be soon at liberty. Finding themselves thus abandoned, each applied himself to his favourite amusement. The ferryman occupied himself in staring about at all that was new; and Osmund, having in the meantime accepted an offer of breakfast from some of the domestics, was presently engaged with a flask of such red wine as would have reconciled him to a worse lot than that which he at present experienced.

The detachment of Tancred, fifty spears and their armed retinue, which amounted fully to five hundred men, after having taken a short and hasty refreshment, were in arms and mounted before the sultry hour of noon. After some manœuvres, of which the Greeks of Scutari, whose curiosity was awakened by the preparations of the detachment,

were at a loss to comprehend the purpose, they formed into a single column, having four men in front. When the horses were in this position, the whole riders at once began to rein back. The action was one to which both the cavaliers and their horses were well accustomed, nor did it at first afford much surprise to the spectators; but when the



"Godfrey in person viewed their progress anxiously" (p. 282)

same retrograde evolution was continued, and the body of crusaders seemed about to enter the town of Scutari in so extraordinary a fashion, some idea of the truth began to occupy the citizens. The cry at length was general, when Tancred and a few others, whose horses were unusually well trained, arrived at the port, and possessed themselves of a

galley, into which they led their horses, and, disregarding all opposition from the imperial officers of the haven, pushed the vessel off from the shore.

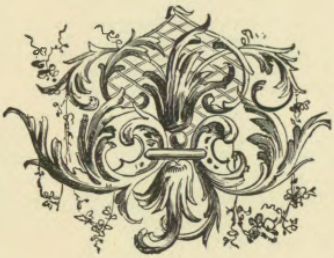
Other cavaliers did not accomplish their purpose so easily; the riders, or the horses, were less accustomed to continue in the constrained pace for such a considerable length of time, so that many of the knights, having retrograded for one or two hundred yards, thought their vow was sufficiently observed by having so far deferred to it, and riding in the ordinary manner into the town, seized without farther ceremony on some vessels, which, notwithstanding the orders of the Greek Emperor, had been allowed to remain on the Asiatic side of the strait. Some less able horsemen met with various accidents; for though it was a proverb of the time that nothing was so bold as a blind horse, yet from this mode of equitation, where neither horse nor rider saw the way he was going, some steeds were overthrown, others backed upon dangerous obstacles; and the bones of the cavaliers themselves suffered much more than would have been the case in an ordinary march.

Those horsemen, also, who met with falls, incurred the danger of being slain by the Greeks, had not Godfrey, surmounting his religious scruples, despatched a squadron to extricate them—a task which they performed with great ease. The greater part of Tancred's followers succeeded in embarking, as was intended, nor was there more than a score or two finally amissing. To accomplish their voyage, however, even the Prince of Otranto himself, and most of his followers, were obliged to betake themselves to the unknightly labours of the oar. This they found extremely difficult, as well from the state both of the tide and the wind, as from the want of practice at the exercise. Godfrey in person viewed their progress anxiously, from a neighbouring height, and perceived with regret the difficulty which they found in making their way, which was still more increased by the necessity for their keeping in a body, and waiting for the slowest and worst manned vessels, which considerably detained those that were more expeditious. They made some progress, however; nor had the commander-in-chief the least doubt that before sunset they would safely reach the opposite side of the strait.

He retired at length from his post of observation, having placed a careful sentinel in his stead, with directions to bring him word the instant that the detachment reached the opposite shore. This the soldier could easily discern by the eye, if it was daylight at the time; if, on the contrary, it was night before they could arrive, the Prince of Otranto had orders to show certain lights, which, in case of their meeting resistance from the Greeks, should be arranged in a peculiar manner, so as to indicate danger.

Godfrey then explained to the Greek authorities of Scutari, whom he summoned before him, the necessity there was that he should keep

in readiness such vessels as could be procured, with which, in case of need, he was determined to transport a strong division from his army to support those who had gone before. He then rode back to his camp, the confused murmurs of which, rendered more noisy by the various discussions concerning the events of the day, rolled off from the numerous host of the crusaders, and mingled with the hoarse sound of the many-billowed Hellespont.



CHAPTER XXIV.

"All is prepared—the chambers of the mine
Are cramm'd with the combustible, which, harmless
While yet unkindled, as the sable sand,
Needs but a spark to change its nature so,
That he who wakes it from its slumbrous mood,
Dreads scarce the explosion less than he who knows
That 'tis his towers which meet its fury."

Anonymous.

WHEN the sky is darkened suddenly, and the atmosphere grows thick and stifling, the lower ranks of creation entertain the ominous sense of a coming tempest. The birds fly to the thickets, the wild creatures retreat to the closest covers which their instinct gives them the habit of frequenting, and domestic animals show their apprehension of the approaching thunderstorm by singular actions and movements inferring fear and disturbance.

It seems that human nature, when its original habits are cultivated and attended to, possesses, on similar occasions, something of that prescient foreboding which announces the approaching tempest to the inferor ranks of creation. The cultivation of our intellectual powers goes perhaps too far when it teaches us entirely to suppress and disregard those natural feelings, which were originally designed as sentinels by which nature warned us of impending danger.

Something of the kind, however, still remains, and that species of feeling which announces to us sorrowful or alarming tidings, may be said, like the prophecies of the weird sisters, to come over us like a sudden cloud.

During the fatal day which was to precede the combat of the

Cæsar with the Count of Paris, there were current through the city of Constantinople the most contradictory, and at the same time the most terrific reports. Privy conspiracy, it was alleged, was on the very eve of breaking out; open war, it was reported by others, was about to shake her banners over the devoted city; the precise cause was not agreed upon, any more than the nature of the enemy. Some said that the barbarians from the borders of Thracia, the Hungarians, as they were termed, and the Comani, were on their march from the frontiers to surprise the city; another report stated that the Turks who, during this period, were established in Asia, had resolved to prevent

"He met Bertha's old ferryman" (p. 286).

the threatened attack of the crusaders upon Palestine, by surprising not only the Western Pilgrims, but the Christians of the East, by one of their innumerable invasions, executed with their characteristic rapidity.

Another report, approaching more near to the truth, declared that the crusaders themselves, having discovered their various causes of complaint against Alexius Comnenus, had resolved to march back their united forces to the capital, with a view of dethroning or chastising him; and the citizens were dreadfully alarmed for the consequences of the resentment of men so fierce in their habits and so strange in their manners. In short, although they did not all agree on the precise cause

of danger, it was yet generally allowed that something of a dreadful kind was impending, which appeared to be in a certain degree confirmed by the motions that were taking place among the troops. The Varangians, as well as the Immortals, were gradually assembled, and placed in occupation of the strongest parts of the city, until at length the fleet of galleys, row-boats, and transports, occupied by Tancred and his party, were observed to put themselves in motion from Scutari, and attempt to gain such a height in the narrow sea, as upon the turn of the tide should transport them to the port of the capital.

Alexius Comnenus was himself struck at this unexpected movement on the part of the crusaders. Yet, after some conversation with Hereward, on whom he had determined to repose his confidence, and had now gone too far to retreat, he became reassured, the more especially by the limited size of the detachment which seemed to meditate so bold a measure as an attack upon his capital. To those around him he said with carelessness that it was hardly to be supposed that a trumpet could blow to the charge, within hearing of the crusaders' camp, without some out of so many knights coming forth to see the cause and the issue of the conflict.

The conspirators also had their secret fears when the little armament of Tancred had been seen on the straits. Agelastes mounted a mule, and went to the shore of the sea, at the place now called Galata. He met Bertha's old ferryman, whom Godfrey had set at liberty, partly in contempt, and partly that the report he was likely to make might serve to amuse the conspirators in the city. Closely examined by Agelastes, he confessed that the present detachment, so far as he understood, was despatched at the instance of Bohemond, and was under the command of his kinsman Tancred, whose well-known banner was floating from the headmost vessel. This gave courage to Agelastes, who, in the course of his intrigues, had opened a private communication with the wily and ever mercenary Prince of Antioch. The object of the philosopher had been to obtain from Bohemond a body of his followers to co-operate in the intended conspiracy and fortify the party of insurgents. It is true, that Bohemond had returned no answer, but the account now given by the ferryman, and the sight of Tancred the kinsman of Bohemond's banner displayed on the straits, satisfied the philosopher that his offers, his presents, and his promises, had gained to his side the avaricious Italian, and that this band had been selected by Bohemond, and were coming to act in his favour.

As Agelastes turned to go off, he almost jostled a person, as much muffled up, and apparently as unwilling to be known, as the philosopher himself. Alexius Comnenus, however—for it was the Emperor himself—knew Agelastes, though rather from his stature and gestures than his countenance, and could not forbear whispering in his ear, as he passed, the well-known lines, to which the pretended sage's various acquisitions gave some degree of point:—

"Grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, aliptes,
Augur, schœnobates, medicus, magus; omnia novit,
Græculus esuriens in cœlum, jusseris, ibit." *

Agelastes first started at the unexpected sound of the Emperor's voice, yet immediately recovered presence of mind, the want of which had made him suspect himself betrayed; and without taking notice of the rank of the person to whom he spoke, he answered by a quotation which should return the alarm he had received. The speech that suggested itself was said to be that which the Phantom of Cleonice dinned into the ears of the tyrant who murdered her—

"Tu cole justitiam; teque atque alios manet ultor." †

The sentence, and the recollections which accompanied it, thrilled through the heart of the Emperor, who walked on, however, without any notice or reply.

"The vile conspirator," he said, "had his associates around him, otherwise he had not hazarded that threat. Or it may have been worse —Agelastes himself, on the very brink of this world, may have obtained that singular glance into futurity proper to that situation, and perhaps speaks less from his own reflection than from a strange spirit of prescience, which dictates his words. Have I then in earnest sinned so far in my imperial duty, as to make it just to apply to me the warning used by the injured Cleonice to her ravisher and murderer? Methinks I have not. Methinks, that at less expense than that of a just severity, I could ill have kept my seat in the high place where Heaven has been pleased to seat me, and where, as a ruler, I am bound to maintain my station. Methinks the sum of those who have experienced my clemency may be well numbered with that of such as have sustained the deserved punishments of their guilt. But has that vengeance, however deserved in itself, been always taken in a legal or justifiable manner? My conscience, I doubt, will hardly answer so home a question; and where is the man, had he the virtues of Antoninus himself, that can hold so high and responsible a place, yet sustain such an interrogation as is implied in that sort of warning which I have received from this traitor? *Tu cole justitiam*—we all need to use justice to others—*Teque atque alios manet ultor*—we are all amenable to an avenging being. I will see the Patriarch—instantly will I see him; and by confessing my transgressions to the Church, I will, by her plenary indulgence, acquire the right of spending the last day of my reign in a consciousness of innocence, or at least of pardon—a state of mind rarely the lot of those whose lines have fallen in lofty places."

* The lines of Juvenal imitated by Johnson in his *London*—

"All sciences a fasting Monsieur knows,
And bid him go to hell—to hell he goes."

† "Do thou cultivate justice: for thee and for others there remains an avenger."—OVID. MET.

So saying, he passed to the palace of Zosimus the Patriarch, to whom he could unbosom himself with more safety, because he had long considered Agelastes as a private enemy to the Church and a man attached to the ancient doctrines of heathenism. In the councils of the state they were also opposed to each other, nor did the Emperor doubt, that in communicating the secret of the conspiracy to the Patriarch, he was sure to attain a loyal and firm supporter in the defence which he proposed to himself. He therefore gave a signal by a low whistle, and a confidential officer, well mounted, approached him, who attended him in his ride, though unostentatiously and at some distance.

In this manner, therefore, Alexius Comnenus proceeded to the palace of the Patriarch, with as much speed as was consistent with his purpose of avoiding to attract any particular notice as he passed through the street. During the whole ride, the warning of Agelastes repeatedly occurred to him, and his conscience reminded him of too many actions of his reign which could only be justified by necessity, emphatically said to be the tyrant's plea, and which were of themselves deserving the dire vengeance so long delayed.

When he came in sight of the splendid towers which adorned the front of the patriarchal palace, he turned aside from the lofty gates, repaired to a narrow court, and again giving his mule to his attendant, he stopped before a postern, whose low arch and humble architrave seemed to exclude the possibility of its leading to any place of importance. On knocking, however, a priest of an inferior order opened the door, who, with a deep reverence, received the Emperor so soon as he had made himself known, and conducted him into the interior of the palace. Demanding a secret interview with the Patriarch, Alexius was then ushered into his private library, where he was received by the aged priest with the deepest respect, which the nature of his communication soon changed into horror and astonishment.

Although Alexius was supposed by many of his own court, and particularly by some members of his own family, to be little better than a hypocrite in his religious professions, yet such severe observers were unjust in branding him with a name so odious. He was indeed aware of the great support which he received from the good opinion of the clergy, and to them he was willing to make sacrifices for the advantage of the Church, or of individual prelates who manifested fidelity to the crown; but though, on the one hand, such sacrifices were rarely made by Alexius without a view to temporal policy, yet, on the other, he regarded them as recommended by his devotional feelings, and took credit to himself for various grants and actions, as dictated by sincere piety, which in another aspect were the fruits of temporal policy. His mode of looking on these measures was that of a person with oblique vision, who sees an object in a different manner, according to the point from which he chances to contemplate it.

The Emperor placed his own errors of government before the

Patriarch in his confession, giving due weight to every breach of morality as it occurred, and stripping from them the lineaments and palliative circumstances which had, in his own imagination, lessened their guilt. The Patriarch heard, to his astonishment, the real thread of many a court intrigue, which had borne a very different appearance till the Emperor's narrative either justified his conduct upon the occasion, or left it totally unjustifiable. Upon the whole, the balance was

"The whole treason of the Cæsar, with his associates, Agelastes and Achilles Tatius, was heard by the Patriarch with wonder and astonishment" (p. 290).

certainly more in favour of Alexius than the Patriarch had supposed likely, in that more distant view he had taken of the intrigues of the court, when, as usual, the ministers and the courtiers endeavoured to make up for the applause which they had given in council to the

most blamable actions of the absolute monarch, by elsewhere imputing to his motives greater guilt than really belonged to them. Many men who had fallen sacrifices, it was supposed, to the personal spleen or jealousy of the Emperor, appeared to have been in fact removed from life, or from liberty, because their enjoying either was inconsistent with the quiet of the state and the safety of the monarch.

Zosimus also learned, what he perhaps already suspected, that amidst the profound silence of despotism which seemed to pervade the Grecian Empire, it heaved frequently with convulsive throes, which ever and anon made obvious the existence of a volcano under the surface. Thus, while smaller delinquencies, or avowed discontent with the imperial government, seldom occurred, and were severely punished when they did, the deepest and most mortal conspiracies against the life and the authority of the Emperor were cherished by those nearest to his person; and he was often himself aware of them, though it was not until they approached an explosion that he dared act upon his knowledge and punish the conspirators.

The whole treason of the Cæsar, with his associates, Agelastes and Achilles Tatius, was heard by the Patriarch with wonder and astonishment, and he was particularly surprised at the dexterity with which the Emperor, knowing the existence of so dangerous a conspiracy at home, had been able to parry the danger from the crusaders occurring at the same moment.

"In that respect," said the Emperor, to whom indeed the Churchman hinted his surprise, "I have been singularly unfortunate. Had I been secure of the forces of my own empire, I might have taken one out of two manly and open courses with these frantic warriors of the West—I might, my reverend father, have devoted the sums paid to Bohemond and other of the more selfish among the crusaders to the honest and open support of the army of Western Christians, and safely transported them to Palestine, without exposing them to the great loss which they are likely to sustain by the opposition of the Infidels; their success would have been in fact my own, and a Latin kingdom in Palestine, defended by its steel-clad warriors, would have been a safe and unexpugnable barrier of the empire against the Saracens. Or, if it was thought more expedient for the protection of the empire and the holy Church, over which you are ruler, we might at once, and by open force, have defended the frontiers of our states against a host commanded by so many different and discording chiefs, and advancing upon us with such equivocal intentions. If the first swarm of these locusts, under him whom they called Walter the Penniless, was thinned by the Hungarians, and totally destroyed by the Turks, as the pyramids of bones on the frontiers of the country still keep in memory, surely the united forces of the Grecian Empire would have had little difficulty in scattering this second flight, though commanded by these Godfreys, Bohemonds, and Tancreds."

The Patriarch was silent, for though he disliked, or rather detested the crusaders, as members of the Latin Church, he yet thought it highly doubtful that in feats of battle they could have been met and overcome by the Grecian forces.

"At any rate," said Alexius, rightly interpreting his silence, "if vanquished, I had fallen under my shield as a Greek emperor should, nor had I been forced into these mean measures of attacking men by stealth, and with forces disguised as infidels; while the lives of the faithful soldiers of the empire, who have fallen in obscure skirmishes, had better, both for them and me, been lost bravely in their ranks, avowedly fighting for their native emperor and their native country. Now, and as the matter stands, I shall be handed down to posterity as a wily tyrant, who engaged his subjects in fatal feuds for the safety of his own obscure life. Patriarch! these crimes rest not with me, but with the rebels whose intrigues compelled me into such courses. What, reverend father, will be my fate hereafter? and in what light shall I descend to posterity, the author of so many disasters?"

"For futurity," said the Patriarch, "your grace hath referred yourself to the holy Church, which hath power to bind and to loose; your means of propitiating her are ample, and I have already indicated such as she may reasonably expect, in consequence of your repentance and forgiveness."

"They shall be granted," replied the Emperor, "in their fullest extent; nor will I injure you in doubting their effect in the next world. In this present state of existence, however, the favourable opinion of the Church may do much for me during this important crisis. If we understand each other, good Zosimus, her doctors and bishops are to thunder in my behalf, nor is my benefit from her pardon to be deferred till the funeral monument closes upon me?"

"Certainly not," said Zosimus; "the conditions which I have already stipulated being strictly attended to."

"And my memory in history," said Alexius, "in what manner is that to be preserved?"

"For that," answered the Patriarch, "your Imperial Majesty must trust to the filial piety and literary talents of your accomplished daughter, Anna Comnena."

The Emperor shook his head. "This unhappy Cæsar," he said, "is like to make a quarrel between us; for I shall scarce pardon so ungrateful a rebel as he is, because my daughter clings to him with a woman's fondness. Besides, good Zosimus, it is not, I believe, the page of a historian such as my daughter that is most likely to be received without challenge by posterity. Some Procopius, some philosophical slave, starving in a garret, aspires to write the life of an emperor whom he durst not approach; and although the principal merit of his production be, that it contains particulars upon the subject which no man durst have promulgated while the prince was living,

yet no man hesitates to admit such as true when he has passed from the scene."

"On that subject," said Zosimus, "I can neither afford your Imperial Majesty relief nor protection. If, however, your memory is unjustly slandered upon earth, it will be a matter of indifference to your Highness, who will be then, I trust, enjoying a state of beatitude which idle slander cannot assail. The only way, indeed, to avoid it while on this side of time, would be to write your Majesty's own memoirs while you are yet in the body; so convinced am I that it is in your power to assign legitimate excuses for those actions of your life which, without your doing so, would seem most worthy of censure."

"Change we the subject," said the Emperor; "and since the danger is imminent, let us take care for the present, and leave future ages to judge for themselves. What circumstance is it, reverend father, in your opinion, which encourages these conspirators to make so audacious an appeal to the populace and the Grecian soldiers?"

"Certainly," answered the Patriarch, "the most irritating incident of your Highness's reign was the fate of Ursel, who, submitting, it is said, upon capitulation, for life, limb, and liberty, was starved to death by your orders in the dungeons of the Blacquernal, and whose courage, liberality, and other popular virtues are still fondly remembered by the citizens of this metropolis, and by the soldiers of the guard, called Immortal."

"And this," said the Emperor, fixing his eye upon his confessor, "your reverence esteems actually the most dangerous point of the popular tumult."

"I cannot doubt," said the Patriarch, "that his very name, boldly pronounced and artfully repeated, will be the watchword, as has been plotted, of a horrible tumult."

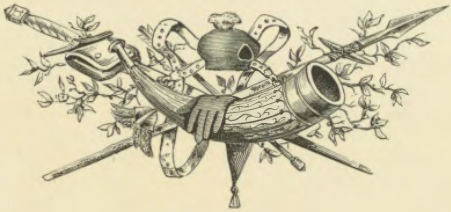
"I thank Heaven!" said the Emperor; "on that particular I will be on my guard. Good-night to your reverence! and, believe me, that all in this scroll to which I have set my hand shall be with the utmost fidelity accomplished. Be not, however, over impatient in this business; —such a shower of benefits falling at once upon the Church would make men suspicious that the prelates and ministers proceeded rather as acting upon a bargain between the Emperor and Patriarch, than as paying or receiving an atonement offered by a sinner in excuse of his crimes. This would be injurious, father, both to yourself and me."

"All regular delay," said the Patriarch, "shall be interposed at your Highness's pleasure; and we shall trust to you for recollection that the bargain, if it could be termed one, was of your own seeking, and that the benefit to the Church was contingent upon the pardon and the support which she has afforded to your Majesty."

"True," said the Emperor, "most true—nor shall I forget it. Once more adieu, and forget not what I have told thee. This is a

night, Zosimus, in which the Emperor must toil like a slave, if he means not to return to the humble Alexius Comnenus, and even then there were no resting-place."

So saying, he took leave of the Patriarch, who was highly gratified with the advantages he had obtained for the Church, which many of his predecessors had struggled for in vain. He resolved, therefore, to support the staggering Alexius.



CHAPTER XXV.

"Heaven knows its time; the bullet has its billet,
Arrow and javelin each its destined purpose;
The fated beasts of nature's lower strain
Have each their separate task."

Old Play.

AGELASTES, after crossing the Emperor in the manner we have already described, and after having taken such measures as occurred to him to ensure the success of the conspiracy, returned to the lodge of his garden, where the lady of the Count of Paris still remained, her only companion being an old woman named Vexhelia, the wife of the soldier who accompanied Bertha to the camp of the crusaders; the kind-hearted maiden having stipulated that, during her absence, her mistress was not to be left without an attendant, and that attendant connected with the Varangian guard. He had been all day playing the part of the ambitious politician, the selfish time-server, the dark and subtle conspirator; and now it seemed, as if to exhaust the catalogue of his various parts in the human drama, he chose to exhibit himself in the character of the wily sophist, and justify, or seem to justify, the arts by which he had risen to wealth and eminence, and hoped even now to arise to royalty itself.

"Fair Countess," he said, "what occasion is there for your wearing this veil of sadness over a countenance so lovely?"

"Do you suppose me," said Brenhilda, "a stock, a stone, or a creature without the feelings of a sensitive being, that I should endure mortification, imprisonment, danger, and distress, without expressing the natural feelings of humanity? Do you imagine that to a lady like me, as free as the unreclaimed falcon, you can offer the insult of captivity, without my being sensible to the disgrace, or incensed

against the authors of it? And dost thou think that I will receive consolation at thy hands—at thine—one of the most active artificers in this web of treachery in which I am so basely entangled?"

"Not entangled certainly by my means," answered Agelastes; "clap your hands, call for what you wish, and the slave who refuses instant obedience had better been unborn. Had I not, with reference to your safety and your honour, agreed for a short time to be your keeper, that office would have been usurped by the Cæsar, whose object you know, and may partly guess the modes by which it would be pursued. Why then dost thou childishly weep at being held for a short space in an honourable restraint, which the renowned arms of your husband will probably put an end to long ere to-morrow at noon?"

"Canst thou not comprehend," said the Countess, "thou man of many words but of few honourable thoughts, that a heart like mine, which has been trained in the feelings of reliance upon my own worth and valour, must be necessarily affected with shame at being obliged to accept, even from the sword of a husband, that safety which I would gladly have owed only to my own?"

"Thou art misled, Countess," answered the philosopher, "by thy pride, a failing predominant in woman. Thinkest thou there has been no offensive assumption in laying aside the character of a mother and a wife, and adopting that of one of those brain-sick female fools, who, like the bravoes of the other sex, sacrifice everything that is honourable or useful to a frantic and insane affectation of courage? Believe me, fair lady, that the true system of virtue consists in filling thine own place gracefully in society, breeding up thy children, and delighting those of the other sex; and anything beyond this may well render thee hateful or terrible, but can add nothing to thy amiable qualities."

"Thou pretendest," said the Countess, "to be a philosopher; methinks thou shouldst know that the fame which hangs its chaplet on the tomb of a brave hero or heroine is worth all the petty engagements in which ordinary persons spend the current of their time. One hour of life, crowded to the full with glorious action, and filled with noble risks, is worth whole years of those mean observances of paltry decorum in which men steal through existence, like sluggish waters through a marsh, without either honour or observation."

"Daughter," said Agelastes, approaching nearer to the lady, "it is with pain I see you bewildered in errors which a little calm reflection might remove. We may flatter ourselves, and human vanity usually does so, that beings infinitely more powerful than those belonging to mere humanity are employed daily in measuring out the good and evil of this world, the termination of combats, or the fate of empires, according to their own ideas of what is right or wrong, or, more properly, according to what we ourselves conceive to be such. The

Greek heathens, renowned for their wisdom, and glorious for their actions, explained to men of ordinary minds the supposed existence of Jupiter and his Pantheon, where various deities presided over various virtues and vices, and regulated the temporal fortune and future happiness of such as practised them. The more learned and wise of the ancients rejected such a vulgar interpretation, and wisely, although affecting a deference to the public faith, denied before their disciples in private, the gross fallacies of Tartarus and Olympus, the vain doctrines concerning the gods themselves, and the extravagant expectations which the vulgar entertained of an immortality, supposed to be possessed by creatures who were in every respect mortal, both in the conformation of their bodies, and in the internal belief of their souls. Of these wise and good men some granted the existence of the supposed deities, but denied that they cared about the actions of mankind any more than those of the inferior animals. A merry, jovial, careless life, such as the followers of Epicurus would choose for themselves, was what they assigned for those gods whose being they admitted. Others, more bold or more consistent, entirely denied the existence of deities who apparently had no proper object or purpose, and believed that such of them, whose being and attributes were proved to us by no supernatural appearances, had in reality no existence whatever."

"Stop, wretch!" said the Countess, "and know that thou speakest not to one of those blinded heathens of whose abominable doctrines you are detailing the result. Know, that if an erring, I am nevertheless a sincere daughter of the Church, and this cross displayed on my shoulder is a sufficient emblem of the vows I have undertaken in its cause. Be therefore wary, as thou art wily; for, believe me, if thou scoffest or utterest reproach against my holy religion, what I am unable to answer in language, I will reply to, without hesitation, with the point of my dagger."

"To that argument," said Agelastes, drawing back from the neighbourhood of Brenhilda, "believe me, fair lady, I am very unwilling to urge your gentleness. But although I shall not venture to say anything of those superior and benevolent powers to whom you ascribe the management of the world, you will surely not take offence at my noticing those base superstitions which have been adopted in explanation of what is called by the Magi, the Evil Principle. Was there ever received into a human creed a being so mean—almost so ridiculous—as the Christian Satan? A goatish figure and limbs, with grotesque features, formed to express the most execrable passions; a degree of power scarce inferior to that of the Deity; and a talent at the same time scarce equal to that of the stupidest of the lowest order! What is he, this being, who is at least the second arbiter of the human race, save an immortal spirit, with the petty spleen and spite of a vindictive old man or old woman?"

Agelastes made a singular pause in this part of his discourse. A

mirror of considerable size hung in the apartment, so that the philosopher could see in its reflection the figure of Brenhilda, and remark the change of her countenance, though she had averted her face from

"The old man twisted and struggled to deliver himself from the creature's grasp, but in vain." (p. 298).

him in hatred of the doctrines which he promulgated. On this glass the philosopher had his eyes naturally fixed, and he was confounded at

perceiving a figure glide from behind the shadow of a curtain and glare at him with the supposed mien and expression of the Satan of monkish mythology, or a satyr of the heathen age.

"Man!" said Brenhilda, whose attention was attracted by this extraordinary apparition, as it seemed, of the fiend, "have thy wicked words, and still more wicked thoughts, brought the devil amongst us? If so, dismiss him instantly, else, by Our Lady of the Broken Lances! thou shalt know better than at present what is the temper of a Frankish maiden, when in presence of the fiend himself, and those who pretend skill to raise him! I wish not to enter into a contest unless compelled; but if I am obliged to join battle with an enemy so horrible, believe me, no one shall say that Brenhilda feared him."

Agelastes, after looking with surprise and horror at the figure as reflected in the glass, turned back his head to examine the substance, of which the reflection was so strange. The object, however, had disappeared behind the curtain, under which it probably lay hid, and it was after a minute or two that the half-gibing, half-scowling countenance showed itself again in the same position in the mirror.

"By the gods!" said Agelastes.

"In whom but now," said the Countess, "you professed unbelief."

"By the gods!" repeated Agelastes, in part recovering himself, "it is Sylvan! that singular mockery of humanity who was said to have been brought from Taprobana. I warrant he also believes in his jolly god Pan, or the veteran Sylvanus. He is to the uninitiated a creature whose appearance is full of terrors, but he shrinks before the philosopher like ignorance before knowledge." So saying, he with one hand pulled down the curtain, under which the animal had nestled itself when it entered from the garden-window of the pavilion, and with the other, in which he had a staff uplifted, threatened to chastise the creature, with the words—"How now, Sylvanus! what insolence is this? To your place!"

As, in uttering these words, he struck the animal, the blow unluckily lighted upon his wounded hand and recalled its bitter smart. The wild temper of the creature returned, unsubdued for the moment by any awe of man; uttering a fierce, and, at the same time, stifled cry, it flew on the philosopher, and clasped its strong and sinewy arms about his throat with the utmost fury. The old man twisted and struggled to deliver himself from the creature's grasp, but in vain. Sylvan kept hold of his prize, compressed his sinewy arms, and abode by his purpose of not quitting his hold of the philosopher's throat until he had breathed his last. Two more bitter yells, accompanied each with a desperate contortion of the countenance and squeeze of the hands, concluded, in less than five minutes, the dreadful strife.

Agelastes lay dead upon the ground, and his assassin Sylvan, springing from the body as if terrified and alarmed at what he had done, made his escape by the window. The Countess stood in astonishment,

not knowing exactly whether she had witnessed a supernatural display of the judgment of Heaven, or an instance of its vengeance by mere mortal means. Her new attendant Vexhelia was no less astonished, though her acquaintance with the animal was considerably more intimate.

"Lady," she said, "that gigantic creature is an animal of great strength, resembling mankind in form, but huge in its size, and, encouraged by its immense power, sometimes malevolent in its intercourse with mortals. I have heard the Varangians often talk of it as belonging to the imperial museum. It is fitting we remove the body of this unhappy man, and hide it in a plot of shrubbery in the garden. It is not likely that he will be missed to-night, and to-morrow there will be other matter astir, which will probably prevent much inquiry about him." The Countess Brenhilda assented, for she was not one of those timorous females to whom the countenances of the dead are objects of terror.

Trusting to the parole which she had given, Agelastes had permitted the Countess and her attendant the freedom of his gardens, of that part at least adjacent to the pavilion. They therefore were in little risk of interruption as they bore forth the dead body between them, and without much trouble disposed of it in the thickest part of one of the bosquets with which the garden was studded.

As they returned to their place of abode or confinement, the Countess, half speaking to herself, half addressing Vexhelia, said, "I am sorry for this; not that the infamous wretch did not deserve the full punishment of Heaven coming upon him in the very moment of blasphemy and infidelity, but because the courage and truth of the unfortunate Brenhilda may be brought into suspicion, as his slaughter took place when he was alone with her and her attendant, and as no one was witness of the singular manner in which the old blasphemer met his end.—Thou knowest," she added, addressing herself to Heaven—"thou! blessed Lady of the Broken Lances, the protectress both of Brenhilda and her husband, well knowest, that whatever faults may be mine, I am free from the slightest suspicion of treachery; and into thy hands I put my cause, with a perfect reliance upon thy wisdom and bounty to bear evidence in my favour." So saying, they returned to the lodge unseen, and with pious and submissive prayers, the Countess closed that eventful evening.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Will you hear of a Spanish lady,
How she wooed an Englishman?
Garments gay, as rich as may be,
Deck'd with jewels she had on.
Of a comely countenance and grace was she,
And by birth and parentage of high degree."

Old Ballad.

WE left Alexius Comnenus after he had unloaded his conscience in the ears of the Patriarch, and received from him a faithful assurance of the pardon and patronage of the national Church. He took leave of the dignitary with some exulting exclamations, so unexplicitly expressed, however, that it was by no means easy to conceive the meaning of what he said. His first inquiry, when he reached the Blacquernal, being for his daughter, he was directed to the room encrusted with beautifully carved marble, from which she herself, and many of her race, derived the proud appellation of *Porphyrogenita*, or born in the purple. Her countenance was clouded with anxiety, which, at the sight of her father, broke out into open and uncontrollable grief.

"Daughter," said the Emperor, with a harshness little common to his manner, and a seriousness which he sternly maintained, instead of

sympathising with his daughter's affliction, "as you would prevent the silly fool with whom you are connected from displaying himself to the public both as an ungrateful monster and a traitor, you will not fail to exhort him, by due submission, to make his petition for pardon, accompanied with a full confession of his crimes, or, by my sceptre and my crown, he shall die the death! Nor will I pardon any who rushes upon his doom in an open tone of defiance, under such a standard of rebellion as my ungrateful son-in-law has hoisted."

"What can you require of me, father?" said the Princess. "Can you expect that I am to dip my own hands in the blood of this unfortunate man; or wilt thou seek a revenge yet more bloody than that which was exacted by the deities of antiquity, upon those criminals who offended against their divine power?"

"Think not so, my daughter!" said the Emperor; "but rather believe that thou hast the last opportunity afforded by my filial affection of rescuing, perhaps from death, that silly fool thy husband, who has so richly deserved it."

"My father," said the Princess, "God knows it is not at your risk that I would wish to purchase the life of Nicephorus; but he has been the father of my children, though they are now no more, and women cannot forget that such a tie has existed, even though it has been broken by fate. Permit me only to hope that the unfortunate culprit shall have an opportunity of retrieving his errors; nor shall it, believe me, be my fault if he resumes those practices, treasonable at once, and unnatural, by which his life is at present endangered."

"Follow me, then, daughter," said the Emperor, "and know that to thee alone I am about to entrust a secret, upon which the safety of my life and crown, as well as the pardon of my son-in-law's life, will be found eventually to depend."

He then assumed in haste the garment of a slave of the Seraglio, and commanded his daughter to arrange her dress in a more succinct form, and to take in her hand a lighted lamp.

"Whither are we going, my father?" said Anna Comnena.

"It matters not," replied her father, "since my destiny calls me, and since thine ordains thee to be my torch-bearer. Believe it, and record it, if thou darest, in thy book, that Alexius Comnenus does not, without alarm, descend into those awful dungeons which his predecessors built for men, even when his intentions are innocent, and free from harm. Be silent, and should we meet any inhabitant of those inferior regions, speak not a word, nor make any observation upon his appearance."

Passing through the intricate apartments of the palace, they now came to that large hall through which Hereward had passed on the first night of his introduction to the place of Anna's recitation, called the Temple of the Muses. It was constructed, as we have said, of

black marble, dimly illuminated. At the upper end of the apartment was a small altar, on which was laid some incense, while over the smoke was suspended, as if projecting from the wall, two imitations of human hands and arms, which were but imperfectly seen.

At the bottom of this hall, a small iron door led to a narrow and winding staircase, resembling a draw-well in shape and size, the steps of which were excessively steep, and which the Emperor, after a solemn gesture to his daughter commanding her attendance, began to descend with the imperfect light, and by the narrow and difficult steps by which those who visited the under regions of the Blacquernal seemed to bid adieu to the light of day. Door after door they passed in their descent, leading, it was probable, to different ranges of dungeons, from which was obscurely heard the stifled voice of groans and sighs, such as attracted Hereward's attention on a former occasion. The Emperor took no notice of these signs of human misery, and three stories, or ranges of dungeons, had been already passed ere the father and daughter arrived at the lowest story of the building, the base of which was the solid rock, roughly carved, upon which were erected the side-walls and arches of solid but unpolished marble.

"Here," said Alexius Comnenus, "all hope, all expectation takes farewell, at the turn of a hinge or the grating of a lock. Yet shall not this be always the case—the dead shall revive and resume their right, and the disinherited of these regions shall again prefer their claim to inhabit the upper world. If I cannot entreat Heaven to my assistance, be assured, my daughter, that rather than be the poor animal which I have stooped to be thought, and even to be painted in thy history, I would sooner brave every danger of the multitude which now erect themselves betwixt me and safety. Nothing is resolved save that I will live and die an Emperor; and thou, Anna, be assured, that if there is power in the beauty or in the talents, of which so much has been boasted, that power shall be this evening exercised to the advantage of thy parent, from whom it is derived."

"What is it that you mean, imperial father? Holy Virgin! is this the promise you made me to save the life of the unfortunate Nicephorus?"

"And so I will," said the Emperor; "and I am now about that action of benevolence. But think not I will once more warm in my bosom the household snake which had so nearly stung me to death. No, daughter, I have provided for thee a fitting husband in one who is able to maintain and defend the rights of the Emperor thy father; and beware how thou opposest an obstacle to what is my pleasure! for behold these walls of marble, though unpolished, and recollect it is as possible to die within the marble as to be born there."

The Princess Anna Comnena was frightened at seeing her father in a state of mind entirely different from any which she had before

witnessed. "O Heaven! that my mother were here!" she ejaculated, in the terror of something she hardly knew what.

"Anna," said the Emperor, "your fears and your screams are alike in vain. I am one of those who, on ordinary occasions, hardly nourish a wish of my own, and account myself obliged to those, who, like my wife and daughter, take care to save me all the trouble of free judgment. But when the vessel is among the breakers, and the master is called to the helm, believe that no meaner hand shall be permitted to interfere with him, nor will the wife and daughter, whom he indulged in prosperity, be allowed to thwart his will while he can yet call it his own. Thou couldst scarcely fail to understand that I was almost prepared to have given thee as a mark of my sincerity to yonder obscure Varangian, without asking question of either birth or blood. Thou mayst hear when I next promise thee to a three years' inhabitant of these vaults, who shall be Cæsar in Briennius's stead, if I can move him to accept a princess for his bride, and an imperial crown for his inheritance, in place of a starving dungeon."

"I tremble at your words, father," said Anna Comnena; "how canst thou trust a man who has felt thy cruelty? How canst thou dream that aught can ever in sincerity reconcile thee to one whom thou hast deprived of his eyesight?"

"Care not for that," said Alexius; "he becomes mine, or he shall never know what it is to be again his own. And thou, girl, mayst rest assured that, if I will it, thou art next day the bride of my present captive, or thou retirest to the most severe nunnery, never again to mix with society. Be silent, therefore, and await thy doom, as it shall come, and hope not that thy utmost endeavours can avert the current of thy destiny."

As he concluded this singular dialogue, in which he had assumed a tone to which his daughter was a stranger, and before which she trembled, he passed on through more than one strictly fastened door, while his daughter, with a faltering step, illuminated him on the obscure road. At length he found admittance by another passage into the cell in which Ursel was confined, and found him reclining in hopeless misery—all those expectations having faded from his heart which the Count of Paris had by his indomitable gallantry for a time excited. He turned his sightless eyes towards the place where he heard the moving of bolts and the approach of steps.

"A new feature," he said, "in my imprisonment—a man comes with a heavy and determined step, and a woman or a child with one that scarcely presses the floor!—Is it my death that you bring?—Believe me, that I have lived long enough in these dungeons to bid my doom welcome."

"It is not thy death, noble Ursel," said the Emperor, in a voice somewhat disguised. "Life, liberty, whatever the world has to give, is placed by the Emperor Alexius at the feet of his noble enemy, and he

trusts that many years of happiness and power, together with the command of a large share of the empire, will soon obliterate the recollection of the dungeons of the Blacquernal."

"It cannot be," said Ursel, with a sigh. "He upon whose eyes the sun has set even at middle day, can have nothing left to hope from the most advantageous change of circumstances."

"You are not entirely assured of that," said the Emperor; "allow us to convince you that what is intended towards you is truly favourable and liberal, and I hope you will be rewarded by finding that there is more possibility of amendment in your case, than your first apprehensions are willing to receive. Make an effort, and try whether your eyes are not sensible of the light of the lamp."

"Do with me," said Ursel, "according to your pleasure; I have neither strength to remonstrate, nor the force of mind equal to make me set your cruelty at defiance. Of something like light I am sensible; but whether it is reality or illusion, I cannot determine. If you are come to deliver me from this living sepulchre, I pray God to requite you; and if, under such deceitful pretence, you mean to take my life, I can only commend my soul to Heaven, and the vengeance due to my death to Him who can behold the darkest places in which injustice can shroud itself."

So saying, and the revulsion of his spirits rendering him unable to give almost any other signs of existence, Ursel sank back upon his seat of captivity, and spoke not another word during the time that Alexius disembarrassed him of those chains which had so long hung about him, that they almost seemed to make a part of his person.

"This is an affair in which thy aid can scarce be sufficient, Anna," said the Emperor; "it would have been well if you and I could have borne him into the open air by our joint strength, for there is little wisdom in showing the secrets of this prison-house to those to whom they are not yet known; nevertheless, go, my child, and at a short distance from the head of the staircase which we descended thou wilt find Edward, the bold and trusty Varangian, who, on your communicating to him my orders, will come hither and render his assistance; and see that you send also the experienced leech, Douban."

Terrified, half-stifled, and half-struck with horror, the lady yet felt a degree of relief from the somewhat milder tone in which her father addressed her. With tottering steps, yet in some measure encouraged by the tenor of her instructions, she ascended the staircase which yawned upon these infernal dungeons. As she approached the top, a large and strong figure threw its broad shadow between the lamp and the opening of the hall. Frightened nearly to death at the thoughts of becoming the wife of a squalid wretch like Ursel, a moment of weakness seized upon the Princess's mind, and, when she considered the melancholy option which her father had placed before her, she could not but think that the handsome and gallant Varangian, who had already rescued

the royal family from such imminent danger, was a fitter person with whom to unite herself, if she must needs make a second choice, than the singular and disgusting being whom her father's policy had raked from the bottom of the Blacquernal dungeons.

I will not say of poor Anna Comnena, who was a timid but not an unfeeling woman, that she would have embraced such a proposal had not the life of her present husband, Nicephorus Briennius, been in extreme danger; and it was obviously the determination of the Emperor, that if he spared him, it should be on the sole condition of unloosing his daughter's hand, and binding her to some one of better faith, and possessed of a greater desire to prove an affectionate son-in-law. Neither did the plan of adopting the Varangian as a second husband, enter decidedly into the mind of the Princess. The present was a moment of danger, in which her rescue to be successful must be sudden, and perhaps, if once achieved, the lady might have had an opportunity of freeing herself both from Ursel and the Varangian, without disjoining either of them from her father's assistance, or of herself losing it. At any rate, the surest means of safety were to secure, if possible, the young soldier, whose features and appearance were of a kind which rendered the task no way disagreeable to a beautiful woman. The schemes of conquest are so natural to the fair sex, and the whole idea passed so quickly through Anna Comnena's mind, that having first entered while the soldier's shadow was interposed between her and the lamp, it had fully occupied her quick imagination, when, with deep reverence and great surprise at her sudden appearance on the ladder of Acheron, the Varangian advancing, knelt down, and lent his arm to the assistance of the fair lady, in order to help her out of the dreary staircase.

"Dearest Hereward," said the lady, with a degree of intimacy which seemed unusual, "how much do I rejoice, in this dreadful night, to have fallen under your protection! I have been in places which the spirit of hell appears to have contrived for the human race." The alarm of the Princess, the familiarity of a beautiful woman, who, while in mortal fear, seeks refuge, like a frightened dove, in the bosom of the strong and the brave, must be the excuse of Anna Comnena for the tender epithet with which she greeted Hereward; nor, if he had chosen to answer in the same tone, which, faithful as he was, might have proved the case if the meeting had chanced before he saw Bertha, would the daughter of Alexius have been, to say the truth, irreconcilably offended. Exhausted as she was, she suffered herself to repose upon the broad breast and shoulder of the Anglo-Saxon; nor did she make an attempt to recover herself, although the decorum of her sex and station seemed to recommend such an exertion. Hereward was obliged himself to ask her, with the unimpassioned and reverential demeanour of a private soldier to a Princess, whether he ought to summon her female attendants? to which she faintly uttered a negative. "No,

no," said she, "I have a duty to execute for my father, and I must not summon eye-witnesses; he knows me to be in safety, Hereward, since he knows I am with thee; and if I am a burden to you in my present state of weakness, I shall soon recover, if you will set me down upon the marble steps."

"Heaven forbid, lady," said Hereward, "that I were thus neglectful of your Highness's gracious health! I see your two young ladies, Astarte and Violante, are in quest of you. Permit me to summon them hither, and I will keep watch upon you if you are unable to retire to your chamber, where, methinks, the present disorder of your nerves will be most properly treated."

"Do as thou wilt, barbarian," said the Princess, rallying herself, with a certain degree of pique, arising perhaps from her not thinking more *dramatis personæ* were appropriate to the scene, than the two who were already upon the stage. Then, as if for the first time, appearing to recollect the message with which she had been commissioned, she exhorted the Varangian to repair instantly to her father.

On such occasions, the slightest circumstances have their effect on the actors. The Anglo-Saxon was sensible that the Princess was somewhat offended, though whether she was so, on account of her being actually in Hereward's arms, or whether the cause of her anger was the being nearly discovered there by the two young maidens, the sentinel did not presume to guess, but departed for the gloomy vaults to join Alexius, with the never-failing double-edged axe, the bane of many a Turk, glittering upon his shoulder.

Astarte and her companion had been despatched by the Empress Irene in search of Anna Comnena, through those apartments of the palace which she was wont to inhabit. The daughter of Alexius could nowhere be found, although the business on which they were seeking her was described by the Empress as of the most pressing nature. Nothing, however, in a palace passes altogether unespied, so that the Empress's messengers at length received information that their mistress and the Emperor had been seen to descend that gloomy access to the dungeons, which, by allusion to the classical infernal regions, was termed the Pit of Acheron. They came thither, accordingly, and we have related the consequences. Hereward thought it necessary to say that her Imperial Highness had swooned upon being suddenly brought into the upper air. The Princess, on the other part, briskly shook off her juvenile attendants, and declared herself ready to proceed to the chamber of her mother. The obeisance which she made Hereward at parting had something in it of haughtiness, yet evidently qualified by a look of friendship and regard. As she passed an apartment in which some of the royal slaves were in waiting, she addressed to one of them, an old respectable man of medical skill, a private and hurried order, desiring him to go to the assistance of her father, whom he would find at the bottom of the staircase called the Pit of Acheron, and to take his scimitar along with

him. To hear, as usual, was to obey, and Douban, for that was his name, only replied by that significant sign which indicates immediate acquiescence. In the meantime, Anna Comnena herself hastened onward to her mother's apartments, in which she found the Empress alone.

"Go hence, maidens," said Irene, "and do not let any one have access to these apartments, even if the Emperor himself should command it. Shut the door," she said, "Anna Comnena; and if the jealousy of the stronger sex do not allow us the masculine privilege of bolts and bars to secure the insides of our apartments, let us avail ourselves, as quickly as may be, of such opportunities as are permitted us; and remember, Princess, that however implicit your duty to your father, it is yet more so to me, who am of the same sex with thyself, and may truly call thee, even according to the letter, blood of my blood, and bone of my bone.—Be assured thy father knows not at this moment the feelings of a woman. Neither he nor any man alive can justly conceive the pangs of the heart which beats under a woman's robe. These men, Anna, would tear asunder without scruple the tenderest ties of affection, the whole structure of domestic felicity, in which lie a woman's cares, her joy, her pain, her love, and her despair. Trust, therefore, to me, my daughter! and believe me, I will at once save thy father's crown and thy happiness. The conduct of thy husband has been wrong, most cruelly wrong; but, Anna, he is a man—and in calling him such, I lay to his charge, as natural frailties, thoughtless treachery, wanton infidelity, every species of folly and inconsistency, to which his race is subject. You ought not, therefore, to think of his faults, unless it be to forgive them."

"Madam," said Anna Comnena, "forgive me if I remind you that you recommend to a princess, born in the purple itself, a line of conduct which would hardly become the female who carries the pitcher for the needful supply of water to the village well. All who are around me have been taught to pay me the obeisance due to my birth, and while this Nicephorus Briennius crept on his knees to your daughter's hand, which you extended towards him, he was rather receiving the yoke of a mistress than accepting a household alliance with a wife. He has incurred his doom, without a touch even of that temptation which may be pled by lesser culprits in his condition; and if it is the will of my father that he should die, or suffer banishment, or imprisonment, for the crime he has committed, it is not the business of Anna Comnena to interfere, she being the most injured among the imperial family, who have in so many, and such gross respects, the right to complain of his falsehood."

"Daughter," replied the Empress, "so far I agree with you, that the treason of Nicephorus towards your father and myself has been in a great degree unpardonable; nor do I easily see on what footing, save that of generosity, his life could be saved. But still you are yourself in

different circumstances from me, and may, as an affectionate and fond wife, compare the intimacies of your former habits with the bloody change which is so soon to be the consequence and the conclusion of his crimes. He is possessed of that person and of those features which women most readily recall to their memory, whether alive or dead. Think what it will cost you to recollect that the rugged executioner received his last salute—that the shapely neck had no better repose than the rough block—that the tongue, the sound of which you used to prefer to the choicest instruments of music, is silent in the dust!"

Anna, who was not insensible to the personal graces of her husband, was much affected by this forcible appeal. "Why distress me thus, mother?" she replied in a weeping accent. "Did I not feel as acutely as you would have me to do, this moment, however awful, would be easily borne. I had but to think of him as he is, to contrast his personal qualities with those of the mind, by which they are more than overbalanced, and resign myself to his deserved fate with unresisting submission to my father's will."

"And that," said the Empress, "would be to bind thee, by his sole fiat, to some obscure wretch, whose habits of plotting and intriguing had, by some miserable chance, given him the opportunity of becoming of importance to the Emperor, and who is therefore to be rewarded by the hand of Anna Comnena."

"Do not think so meanly of me, madam," said the Princess. "I know, as well as ever Grecian maiden did, how I should free myself from dishonour; and, you may trust me, you shall never blush for your daughter."

"Tell me not that," said the Empress, "since I shall blush alike for the relentless cruelty which gives up a once beloved husband to an ignominious death, and for the passion, for which I want a name, which would replace him by an obscure barbarian from the extremity of Thule, or some wretch escaped from the Blacquernal dungeons."

The Princess was astonished to perceive that her mother was acquainted with the purposes, even the most private, which her father had formed for his governance during this emergency. She was ignorant that Alexius and his royal consort, in other respects living together with a decency ever exemplary in people of their rank, had sometimes, on interesting occasions, family debates, in which the husband, provoked by the seeming unbelief of his partner, was tempted to let her guess more of his real purposes than he would have coolly imparted of his own calm choice.

The Princess was affected at the anticipation of the death of her husband, nor could this have been reasonably supposed to be otherwise; but she was still more hurt and affronted by her mother taking it for granted that she designed upon the instant to replace the Cæsar by an uncertain, and at all events an unworthy successor. Whatever considerations had operated to make Hereward her choice, their effect

was lost when the match was placed in this odious and degrading point of view; besides which is to be remembered that women almost instinctively deny their first thoughts in favour of a suitor, and seldom willingly reveal them, unless time and circumstance concur to favour them. She called Heaven, therefore, passionately to witness while she repelled the charge.

"'I will show you,' said the Empress gravely" (p. 310).

"Bear witness," she said, "Our Lady, Queen of Heaven! Bear witness, saints and martyrs all, ye blessed ones, who are, more than ourselves, the guardians of our mental purity! that I know no passion which I dare not avow, and that if Nicephorus's life depended on my entreaty to God and men, all his injurious acts towards me disregarded and despised, it should be as long as Heaven gave to those servants

whom it snatched from the earth, without suffering the pangs of mortality!"

"You have sworn boldly," said the Empress. "See, Anna Comnena, that you keep your word, for believe me it will be tried."

"What will be tried, mother?" said the Princess; "or what have I to do to pronounce the doom of the Cæsar, who is not subject to my power?"

"I will show you," said the Empress gravely; and, leading her towards a sort of wardrobe, which formed a closet in the wall, she withdrew a curtain which hung before it, and placed before her her unfortunate husband, Nicephorus Briennius, half-attired, with his sword drawn in his hand. Looking upon him as an enemy, and conscious of some schemes with respect to him which had passed through her mind in the course of these troubles, the Princess screamed faintly, upon perceiving him so near her with a weapon in his hand.

"Be more composed," said the Empress, "or this wretched man, if discovered, falls no less a victim to thy idle fears than to thy baneful revenge."

Nicephorus at this speech seemed to have adopted his cue, for, dropping the point of his sword and falling on his knees before the Princess, he clasped his hands to entreat for mercy.

"What hast thou to ask from me?" said his wife, naturally assured, by her husband's prostration, that the stronger force was upon her own side—"What hast thou to ask from me, that outraged gratitude, betrayed affection, the most solemn vows violated, and the fondest ties of nature torn asunder like the spider's broken web, will permit thee to put in words for very shame?"

"Do not suppose, Anna," replied the suppliant, "that I am at this eventful period of my life to play the hypocrite, for the purpose of saving the wretched remnant of a dishonoured existence. I am but desirous to part in charity with thee, to make my peace with Heaven, and to nourish the last hope of making my way, though burdened with many crimes, to those regions in which alone I can find thy beauty, thy talents, equalled at least, if not excelled."

"You hear him, daughter?" said Irene; "his boon is for forgiveness alone; thy condition is the more godlike, since thou mayst unite the safety of his life with the pardon of his offences."

"Thou art deceived, mother," answered Anna. "It is not mine to pardon his guilt, far less to remit his punishment. You have taught me to think of myself as future ages shall know me; what will they say of me, those future ages, when I am described as the unfeeling daughter who pardoned the intended assassin of her father, because she saw in him her own unfaithful husband?"

"See there," said the Cæsar, "is not that, most serene Empress, the very point of despair? and have I not in vain offered my life-blood to wipe out the stain of parricide and ingratitude? Have I not also

vindicated myself from the most unpardonable part of the accusation, which charged me with attempting the murder of the godlike Emperor? Have I not sworn by all that is sacred to man, that my purpose went no farther than to sequestrate Alexius for a little time from the fatigues of empire, and place him where he should quietly enjoy ease and tranquillity; while, at the same time, his empire should be as implicitly regulated by himself, his sacred pleasure being transmitted through me, as in any respect, or at any period, it had ever been?"

"Erring man!" said the Princess, "hast thou approached so near to the footstool of Alexius Comnenus, and durst thou form so false an estimate of him, as to conceive it possible that he would consent to be a mere puppet by whose intervention you might have brought his empire to submission? Know that the blood of Comnenus is not so poor; my father would have resisted the treason in arms; and by the death of thy benefactor only couldst thou have gratified the suggestions of thy criminal ambition."

"Be such your belief," said the Cæsar; "I have said enough for a life which is not and ought not to be dear to me. Call your guards, and let them take the life of the unfortunate Briennius, since it has become hateful to his once beloved Anna Comnena. Be not afraid that any resistance of mine shall render the scene of my apprehension dubious or fatal. Nicephorus Briennius is Cæsar no longer, and he thus throws at the feet of his Princess and spouse the only poor means which he has of resisting the just doom which is therefore at her pleasure to pass."

He cast his sword before the feet of the Princess, while Irene exclaimed, weeping, or seeming to weep bitterly, "I have indeed read of such scenes; but could I ever have thought that my own daughter would have been the principal actress in one of them—could I ever have thought that her mind, admired by every one as a palace for the occupation of Apollo and the Muses, should not have had room enough for the humbler, but more amiable virtue of feminine charity and compassion, which builds itself a nest in the bosom of the lowest village girl? Do thy gifts, accomplishments, and talents, spread hardness as well as polish over thy heart? If so, a hundred times better renounce them all, and retain in their stead those gentle and domestic virtues which are the first honours of the female heart. A woman who is pitiless, is a worse monster than one who is unsexed by any other passion."

"What would you have me do?" said Anna; "you, mother, ought to know better than I, that the life of my father is hardly consistent with the existence of this bold and cruel man. Oh, I am sure he still meditates his purpose of conspiracy! He that could deceive a woman in the manner he has done me, will not relinquish a plan which is founded upon the death of his benefactor."

"You do me injustice, Anna," said Briennius, starting up and

imprinting a kiss upon her lips ere she was aware. "By this caress, the last that will pass between us, I swear, that if in my life I have yielded to folly, I have, notwithstanding, never been guilty of a treason of the heart towards a woman as superior to the rest of the female world in talents and accomplishments, as in personal beauty."

The Princess, much softened, shook her head, as she replied, "Ah, Nicephorus! such were once your words! such, perhaps, were then your thoughts! But who, or what, shall now warrant to me the veracity of either?"

"Those very accomplishments, and that very beauty itself," replied Nicephorus.

"And if more is wanting," said Irene, "thy mother will enter her security for him. Deem her not an insufficient pledge in this affair; she is thy mother, and the wife of Alexius Comnenus, interested beyond all human beings in the growth and increase of the power and dignity of her husband and her child; and one who sees on this occasion an opportunity for exercising generosity, for soldering up the breaches of the imperial house and reconstructing the frame of government upon a basis, which, if there be faith and gratitude in man, shall never be again exposed to hazard."

"To the reality of that faith and gratitude, then," said the Princess, "we must trust implicitly, as it is your will, mother; although even my own knowledge of the subject, both through study and experience of the world, has called me to observe the rashness of such confidence. But although we two may forgive Nicephorus's errors, the Emperor is still the person to whom the final reference must be had, both as to pardon and favour."

"Fear not Alexius," answered her mother; "he will speak determinedly and decidedly; but, if he acts not in the very moment of forming the resolution, it is no more to be relied on than an icicle in time of thaw. Do thou apprize me, if thou canst, what the Emperor is at present doing, and take my word I will find means to bring him round to our opinion."

"Must I then betray secrets which my father has entrusted to me?" said the Princess; "and to one who has so lately held the character of his avowed enemy?"

"Call it not betray," said Irene, "since it is written, thou shalt betray no one, least of all thy father, and the father of the empire. Yet again it is written by the holy Luke, that men shall be betrayed, both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and therefore surely also by daughters; by which I only mean thou shalt discover to us thy father's secrets, so far as may enable us to save the life of thy husband. The necessity of the case excuses whatever may be otherwise considered as irregular."

"Be it so then, mother. Having yielded my consent, perhaps too easily, to snatch this malefactor from my father's justice, I am sensible

I must secure his safety by such means as are in my power. I left my father at the bottom of those stairs, called the Pit of Acheron, in the cell of a blind man, to whom he gave the name of Ursel."

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed the Empress, "thou hast named a name which has been long unspoken in the open air."

"Has the Emperor's sense of his danger from the living," said the Cæsar, "induced him to invoke the dead? for Ursel has been no living man for the space of three years."

"It matters not," said Anna Comnena; "I tell you true. My father even now held conference with a miserable-looking prisoner whom he so named."

"It is a danger the more," said the Cæsar; "he cannot have forgotten the zeal with which I embraced the cause of the present Emperor against his own; and so soon as he is at liberty he will study to avenge it. For this we must endeavour to make some provision, though it increases our difficulties. Sit down then, my gentle, my beneficent mother;—and thou, my wife, who hast preferred thy love for an unworthy husband to the suggestions of jealous passion and of headlong revenge, sit down, and let us see in what manner it may be in our power, consistently with your duty to the Emperor, to bring our broken vessel securely into port."

He employed much natural grace of manner in handing the mother and daughter to their seats; and, taking his place confidentially between them, all were soon engaged in concerting what measures should be taken for the morrow, not forgetting such as should at once have the effect of preserving the Cæsar's life, and at the same time of securing the Grecian Empire against the conspiracy of which he had been the chief instigator. Briennius ventured to hint that perhaps the best way would be to suffer the conspiracy to proceed as originally intended, pledging his own faith that the rights of Alexius should be held inviolate during the struggle; but his influence over the Empress and her daughter did not extend to obtaining so great a trust. They plainly protested against permitting him to leave the palace, or taking the least share in the confusion which to-morrow was certain to witness.

"You forget, noble ladies," said the Cæsar, "that my honour is concerned in meeting the Count of Paris."

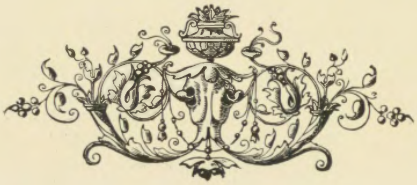
"Pshaw! tell me not of your honour, Briennius," said Anna Comnena; "do I not well know, that although the honour of the Western knights be a species of Moloch, a flesh-devouring, blood-quaffing demon, yet that which is the god of idolatry to the Eastern warriors, though equally loud and noisy in the hall, is far less implacable in the field? Believe not that I have forgiven great injuries and insults in order to take such false coin as *honour* in payment. Your ingenuity is but poor if you cannot devise some excuse which will satisfy the Greeks; and in good sooth, Briennius, to this battle you go not, whether for your good or for your ill. Believe not that I will consent to your meeting either Count

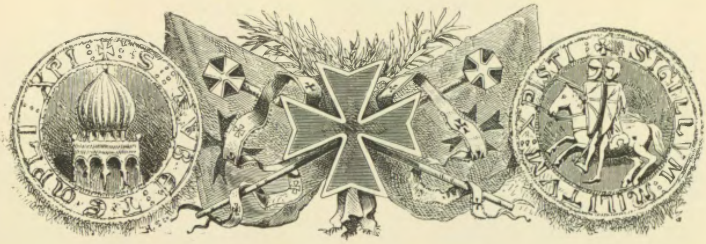
or Countess, whether in warlike combat or amorous parley. So you may at a word count upon remaining prisoner here until the hour appointed for such gross folly be past and over."

The Cæsar, perhaps, was not in his heart angry that his wife's pleasure was so bluntly and resolutely expressed against the intended combat. "If," said he, "you are determined to take my honour into your own keeping, I am here for the present your prisoner, nor have I the means of interfering with your pleasure. When once at liberty, the free exercise of my valour and my lance is once more my own."

"Be it so, Sir Paladin," said the Princess, very composedly. "I have good hope that neither of them will involve you with any of yon dare-devils of Paris, whether male or female, and that we will regulate the pitch to which your courage soars, by the estimation of Greek philosophy and the judgment of our blessed Lady of Mercy, not her of the Broken Lances."

At this moment, an authoritative knock at the door alarmed the consultation of the Cæsar and the ladies.





CHAPTER XXVII.

"*Physician.* Be comforted, good madam; the great rage,
You see, is cured in him: and yet it is danger
To make him even o'er the time he has lost.
Desire him to go in: trouble him no more,
Till further settling."

King Lear.

WE left the Emperor Alexius Comnenus at the bottom of a subterranean vault, with a lamp expiring, and having charge of a prisoner, who seemed himself nearly reduced to the same extremity. For the first two or three moments, he listened after his daughter's retiring footsteps. He grew impatient, and began to long for her return before it was possible she could have traversed the path betwixt him and the summit of these gloomy stairs. A minute or two he endured with patience the absence of the assistance which he had sent her to summon; but strange suspicions began to cross his imagination. Could it be possible? Had she changed her purpose on account of the hard words which he had used towards her? Had she resolved to leave her father to his fate in his hour of utmost need? and was he to rely no longer upon the assistance which he had implored her to send?

The short time which the Princess trifled away in a sort of gallantry with the Varangian Hereward, was magnified tenfold by the impatience of the Emperor, who began to think that she was gone to fetch the accomplices of the Cæsar to assault their prince in his defenceless condition, and carry into effect their half-disconcerted conspiracy.

After a considerable time, filled up with this feeling of agonising uncertainty, he began at length, more composedly, to recollect the little chance there was that the Princess would, even for her own sake,

resentful as she was in the highest degree of her husband's ill behaviour, join her resources to his, to the destruction of one who had so generally showed himself an indulgent and affectionate father. When he had adopted this better mood a step was heard upon the staircase, and after a long and unequal descent, Hereward, in his heavy armour, at length coolly arrived at the bottom of the steps. Behind him, panting and trembling, partly with cold and partly with terror, came Douban, the slave well skilled in medicine.

"Welcome, good Edward! Welcome, Douban!" he said, "whose medical skill is sufficiently able to counterbalance the weight of years which hang upon him."

"Your Highness is gracious," said Douban—but what he would have further said was cut off by a violent fit of coughing, the consequence of his age, of his feeble habit, of the damps of the dungeon, and the rugged exercise of descending the long and difficult staircase.

"Thou art unaccustomed to visit thy patients in so rough an abode," said Alexius; "and, nevertheless, to the damps of these dreary regions state necessity obliges us to confine many, who are no less our beloved subjects in reality than they are in title."

The medical man continued his cough, perhaps as an apology for not giving that answer of assent, with which his conscience did not easily permit him to reply to an observation, which, though stated by one who should know the fact, seemed not to be in itself altogether likely.

"Yes, my Douban," said the Emperor, "in this strong case of steel and adamant have we found it necessary to enclose the redoubted Ursel, whose fame is spread through the whole world, both for military skill, political wisdom, personal bravery, and other noble gifts, which we have been obliged to obscure for a time, in order that we might, at the fittest conjuncture, which is now arrived, restore them to the world in their full lustre. Feel his pulse, therefore, Douban—consider him as one who hath suffered severe confinement, with all its privations, and is about to be suddenly restored to the full enjoyment of life, and whatever renders life valuable."

"I will do my best," said Douban; "but your Majesty must consider that we work upon a frail and exhausted subject, whose health seems already well-nigh gone, and may perhaps vanish in an instant—like this pale and trembling light, whose precarious condition the life-breath of this unfortunate patient seems closely to resemble."

"Desire, therefore, good Douban, one or two of the mutes who serve in the interior, and who have repeatedly been thy assistants in such cases—or stay—Edward, thy motions will be more speedy; do thou go for the mutes—make them bring some kind of litter to transport the patient; and, Douban, do thou superintend the whole. Transport him instantly to a suitable apartment, only taking care that it be secret, and let him enjoy the comforts of the bath, and whatever

else may tend to restore his feeble animation—keeping in mind that he must, if possible, appear to-morrow in the field."

"That will be hard," said Douban, "after having been, it would appear, subjected to such fare and such usage as his fluctuating pulse intimates but too plainly."

"'Twas a mistake of the dungeon-keeper, the inhuman villain, who should not go without his reward," continued the Emperor, "had not Heaven already bestowed it by the strange means of a sylvan man, or native of the woods, who yesterday put to death the jailer who meditated the death of his prisoner. Yes, my dear Douban, a private sentinel of our guards called the Immortal, had well-nigh annihilated this flower of our trust, whom for a time we were compelled to immure in secret. Then, indeed, a rude hammer had dashed to pieces an unparalleled brilliant, but the fates have arrested such a misfortune."

The assistance having arrived, the physician, who seemed more accustomed to act than to speak, directed a bath to be prepared with medicated herbs, and gave it as his opinion that the patient should not be disturbed till to-morrow's sun was high in the heavens. Ursel accordingly was assisted to the bath, which was employed according to the directions of the physician; but without affording any material symptoms of recovery. From thence he was transferred to a cheerful bed-chamber, opening by an ample window to one of the terraces of the palace, which commanded an extensive prospect. These operations were performed upon a frame so extremely stupefied by previous suffering, so dead to the usual sensations of existence, that it was not till the sensibility should be gradually restored, by friction of the stiffened limbs and other means, that the leech hoped the mists of the intellect should at length begin to clear away.

Douban readily undertook to obey the commands of the Emperor, and remained by the bed of the patient until the dawn of morning, ready to support nature as far as the skill of leechcraft admitted.

From the mutes, much more accustomed to be the executioners of the Emperor's displeasure than of his humanity, Douban selected one man of milder mood, and by Alexius's order, made him understand, that the task in which he was engaged was to be kept most strictly secret, while the hardened slave was astonished to find that the attentions paid to the sick were to be rendered with yet more mystery than the bloody offices of death and torture.

The passive patient received the various acts of attention which were rendered to him in silence; and if not totally without consciousness, at least without a distinct comprehension of their object. After the soothing operation of the bath and the voluptuous exchange of the rude and musty pile of straw, on which he had stretched himself for years, for a couch of the softest down, Ursel was presented with a sedative draught, slightly tinctured with an opiate. The balmy restorer of nature came thus invoked, and the captive sank into a

delicious slumber long unknown to him, and which seemed to occupy equally his mental faculties and his bodily frame, while the features were released from their rigid tenor, and the posture of the limbs, no longer disturbed by fits of cramp, and sudden agonising twists and throes, seemed changed for a placid state of the most perfect ease and tranquillity.

The morn was already colouring the horizon, and the freshness of the breeze of dawn had insinuated itself into the lofty halls of the palace of the Blacquernal, when a gentle tap at the door of the chamber awakened Douban, who, undisturbed from the calm state of his patient, had indulged himself in a brief repose. The door opened, and a figure appeared, disguised in the robes worn by an officer of the palace, and concealed beneath an artificial beard of great size and of a white colour the features of the Emperor himself. "Douban," said Alexius, "how fares it with thy patient, whose safety is this day of such consequence to the Grecian state?"

"Well, my lord," replied the physician, "excellently well; and if he is not now disturbed, I will wager whatever skill I possess, that nature, assisted by the art of the physician, will triumph over the damps and the unwholesome air of the impure dungeon. Only be prudent, my lord, and let not an untimely haste bring this Ursel forward into the contest ere he has arranged the disturbed current of his ideas, and recovered, in some degree, the spring of his mind and the powers of his body."

"I will rule my impatience," said the Emperor, "or rather, Douban, I will be ruled by thee. Think'st thou he is awake?"

"I am inclined to think so," said the leech, "but he opens not his eyes, and seems to me as if he absolutely resisted the natural impulse to rouse himself and look around him."

"Speak to him," said the Emperor, "and let us know what is passing in his mind."

"It is at some risk," replied the physician, "but you shall be obeyed.—Ursel," he said, approaching the bed of his blind patient, and then, in a louder tone, he repeated again, "Ursel! Ursel!"

"Peace—hush!" muttered the patient; "disturb not the blest in their ecstasy—nor again recall the most miserable of mortals to finish the draught of bitterness which his fate had compelled him to commence."

"Again, again," said the Emperor, aside to Douban, "try him yet again; it is of importance for me to know in what degree he possesses his senses, or in what measure they have disappeared from him."

"I would not, however," said the physician, "be the rash and guilty person, who, by an ill-timed urgency, should produce a total alienation of mind, and plunge him back either into absolute lunacy, or produce a stupor, in which he might remain for a long period."

"Surely not," replied the Emperor; "my commands are those of one Christian to another, nor do I wish them farther obeyed than as they are consistent with the laws of God and man."

He paused for a moment after this declaration, and yet but few minutes had elapsed ere he again urged the leech to pursue the interrogation of his patient. "If you hold me not competent," said Douban, somewhat vain of the trust necessarily reposed in him, "to judge of the treatment of my patient, your Imperial Highness must take the risk and the trouble upon yourself."

"Marry, I shall," said the Emperor, "for the scruples of leeches are not to be indulged when the fate of kingdoms and the lives of monarchs are placed against them in the scales.—Rouse thee, my noble Ursel! hear a voice, with which thy ears were once well acquainted, welcome thee back to glory and command! Look around thee and see how the world smiles to welcome thee back from imprisonment to empire!"

"Cunning fiend!" said Ursel, "who usest the most wily baits in order to augment the misery of the wretched! Know, tempter, that I am conscious of the whole trick of the soothing images of last night —thy baths—thy beds—and thy bowers of bliss. But sooner shalt thou be able to bring a smile upon the cheek of St. Anthony the Eremite, than induce me to curl mine after the fashion of earthly voluptuaries."

"Try it, foolish man," insisted the Emperor, "and trust to the evidence of thy senses for the reality of the pleasures by which thou art now surrounded; or, if thou art obstinate in thy lack of faith, tarry as thou art for a single moment, and I will bring with me a being so unparalleled in her loveliness, that a single glance of her were worth the restoration of thine eyes, were it only to look upon her for a moment." So saying he left the apartment.

"Traitor," said Ursel, "and deceiver of old, bring no one hither! and strive not, by shadowy and ideal forms of beauty, to increase the delusion that gilds my prison-house for a moment, in order, doubtless, to destroy totally the spark of reason, and then exchange this earthly hell for a dungeon in the infernal regions themselves."

"His mind is somewhat shattered," mused the physician, "which is often the consequence of a long solitary confinement. I marvel much," was his further thought, "if the Emperor can shape out any rational service which this man can render him, after being so long immured in so horrible a dungeon.—Thou thinkest, then," continued he, addressing the patient, "that the seeming release of last night, with its baths and refreshments, was only a delusive dream, without any reality?"

"Ay—what else?" answered Ursel.

"And that the arousing thyself, as we desire thee to do, would be but a resigning to a vain temptation, in order to wake to more unhappiness than formerly?"

"Even so," returned the patient.

"What, then, are thy thoughts of the Emperor by whose command thou sufferest so severe a restraint?"

Perhaps Douban wished he had forborne this question, for, in the very moment when he put it, the door of the chamber opened, and the Emperor entered, with his daughter hanging upon his arm, dressed with simplicity, yet with becoming splendour. She had found time, it seems, to change her dress for a white robe, which resembled a kind of mourning, the chief ornament of which was a diamond chaplet, of inestimable value, which surrounded and bound the long sable tresses that reached from her head to her waist. Terrified almost to death, she had been surprised by her father in the company of her husband the Cæsar, and her mother; and the same thundering mandate had at once ordered Briennius, in the character of a more than suspected traitor, under the custody of a strong guard of Varangians, and commanded her to attend her father to the bed-chamber of Ursel, in which she now stood; resolved, however, that she would stick by the sinking fortunes of her husband, even in the last extremity, yet no less determined that she would not rely upon her own entreaties or remonstrances until she should see whether her father's interference was likely to reassume a resolved and positive character. Hastily as the plans of Alexius had been formed, and hastily as they had been disconcerted by accident, there remained no slight chance that he might be forced to come round to the purpose on which his wife and daughter had fixed their heart, the forgiveness, namely, of the guilty Nicephorus Briennius. To his astonishment, and not perhaps greatly to his satisfaction, he heard the patient deeply engaged with the physician in canvassing his own character.

"Think not," said Ursel in reply to him, "that though I am immured in this dungeon, and treated as something worse than an outcast of humanity—and although I am, moreover, deprived of my eyesight, the dearest gift of Heaven—think not, I say, though I suffer all this by the cruel will of Alexius Comnenus, that therefore I hold him to be mine enemy; on the contrary, it is by his means that the blinded and miserable prisoner has been taught to seek a liberty far more unconstrained than this poor earth can afford, and a vision far more clear than any Mount Pisgah on this wretched side of the grave can give us: shall I therefore account the Emperor among mine enemies? He who has taught me the vanity of earthly things—the nothingness of earthly enjoyments—and the pure hope of a better world, as a certain exchange for the misery of the present? No!"

The Emperor had stood somewhat disconcerted at the beginning of this speech, but hearing it so very unexpectedly terminate, as he was willing to suppose, much in his own favour, he threw himself into an attitude which was partly that of a modest person listening to his

own praises, and partly that of a man highly struck with the commendations heaped upon him by a generous adversary.

"My friend," he said aloud, "how truly do you read my purpose, when you suppose that the knowledge which men of your disposition can extract from evil, was all the experience which I wished you to derive from a captivity protracted by adverse circumstances, far, very far, beyond my wishes! Let me embrace the generous man who knows so well how to construe the purpose of a perplexed, but still faithful friend."

The patient raised himself in his bed.

"The patient raised himself in his bed"

"Hold, there!" he said, "methinks my faculties begin to collect themselves. Yes," he muttered, "that is the treacherous voice which first bid me welcome as a friend, and then commanded fiercely that I should be deprived of the sight of my eyes!—Increase thy rigour if thou wilt, Comnenus—add, if thou canst, to the torture of my confinement—but since I cannot see thy hypocritical and inhuman features, spare me, in mercy, the sound of a voice more distressing to mine ears than toads, than serpents—than whatever nature has most offensive and disgusting!"

This speech was delivered with so much energy, that it was in vain

that the Emperor strove to interrupt its tenor; although he himself, as well as Douban and his daughter, heard a great deal more of the language of unadorned and natural passion than he had counted upon.

"Raise thy head, rash man," he said, "and charm thy tongue, ere it proceed in a strain which may cost thee dear. Look at me, and see if I have not reserved a reward capable of atoning for all the evil which thy folly may charge to my account."

Hitherto the prisoner had remained with his eyes obstinately shut, regarding the imperfect recollection he had of sights which had been before his eyes the foregoing evening, as the mere suggestion of a deluded imagination, if not actually presented by some seducing spirit. But now when his eyes fairly encountered the stately figure of the Emperor and the graceful form of his lovely daughter, painted in the tender rays of the morning dawn, he ejaculated faintly, "I see! I see!" and with that ejaculation fell back on the pillow in a swoon, which instantly found employment for Douban and his restoratives.

"A most wonderful cure indeed!" exclaimed the physician; "and the height of my wishes would be to possess such another miraculous restorative."

"Fool!" said the Emperor; "canst thou not conceive that what has never been taken away is restored with little difficulty? He was made," he said, lowering his voice, "to undergo a painful operation, which led him to believe that the organs of sight were destroyed; and as light scarcely ever visited him, and when it did, only in doubtful and almost invisible glimmerings, the prevailing darkness, both physical and mental, that surrounded him prevented him from being sensible of the existence of that precious faculty of which he imagined himself bereft. Perhaps thou wilt ask my reason for inflicting upon him so strange a deception? Simply it was, that being by it conceived incapable of reigning, his memory might pass out of the minds of the public, while, at the same time, I reserved his eyesight that, in case occasion should call, it might be in my power once more to liberate him from his dungeon and employ, as I now propose to do, his courage and talents in the service of the empire, to counterbalance those of other conspirators."

"And can your Imperial Highness," said Douban, "hope that you have acquired this man's duty and affection by the conduct you have observed to him?"

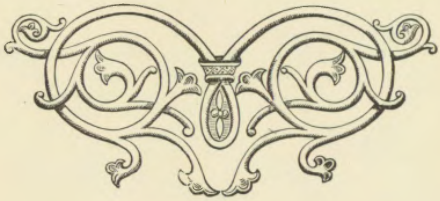
"I cannot tell," answered the Emperor; "that must be as futurity shall determine. All I know is, that it is no fault of mine if Ursel does not reckon freedom and a long course of empire—perhaps sanctioned by an alliance with our own blood—and the continued enjoyment of the precious organs of eyesight, of which a less scrupulous man would have deprived him, against a maimed and darkened existence."

"Since such is your Highness's opinion and resolution," said Douban, "it is for me to aid, and not to counteract it. Permit me, therefore, to pray your Highness and the Princess to withdraw, that I

may use such remedies as may confirm a mind which has been so strangely shaken, and restore to him fully the use of those eyes, of which he has been so long deprived."

"I am content, Douban," said the Emperor; "but take notice, Ursel is not totally at liberty until he has expressed the resolution to become actually mine. It may behove both him and thee to know, that although there is no purpose of remitting him to the dungeons of the Blacquernal palace, yet if he, or any on his part, should aspire to head a party in these feverish times, by the honour of a gentleman, to swear a Frankish oath, he shall find that he is not out of the reach of the battle-axes of my Varangians. I trust to thee to communicate this fact, which concerns alike him and all who have interest in his fortunes. —Come, daughter, we will withdraw, and leave the leech with his patient. —Take notice, Douban, it is of importance that you acquaint me the very first moment when the patient can hold rational communication with me."

Alexius and his accomplished daughter departed accordingly.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Bears yet a precious jewel in its head."

As You Like It.

FROM a terraced roof of the Blacquernal palace, accessible by a sash-door, which opened from the bed-chamber of Ursel, there was commanded one of the most lovely and striking views which the romantic neighbourhood of Constantinople afforded.

After suffering him to repose and rest his agitated faculties, it was to this place that the physician led his patient; for when somewhat composed, he had of himself requested to be permitted to verify the truth of his restored eyesight, by looking out once more upon the majestic face of nature.

On the one hand the scene which he beheld was a masterpiece of human art. The proud city, ornamented with stately buildings, as became the capital of the world, showed a succession of glittering spires and orders of architecture, some of them chaste and simple, like those the capitals of which were borrowed from baskets full of acanthus; some deriving the fluting of their shafts from the props made originally to support the lances of the earlier Greeks; forms simple, yet more graceful in their simplicity than any which human ingenuity has been able since to invent. With the most splendid specimens which ancient art could afford of those strictly classical models were associated those of a later age, where more modern taste had endeavoured at improvement, and, by mixing the various orders, had produced such as were either composite or totally out of rule. The size of the buildings in which they were displayed, however, procured them respect; nor

could even the most perfect judge of architecture avoid being struck by the grandeur of their extent and effect, although hurt by the incorrectness of the taste in which they were executed. Arches of triumph, towers, obelisks, and spires, designed for various purposes, rose up into the air in confused magnificence; while the lower view was filled by the streets of the city, the domestic habitations forming long narrow alleys, on either side of which the houses arose to various and unequal heights, but, being generally finished with terraced coverings, thickset with plants, and flowers, and fountains, had, when seen from an eminence, a more noble and interesting aspect than is ever afforded by the sloping and uniform roofs of streets in the capitals of the north of Europe.

It has taken us some time to give, in words, the idea which was at a single glance conveyed to Ursel, and affected him at first with great pain. His eyeballs had been long strangers to that daily exercise which teaches us the habit of correcting the scenes as they appear to our sight by the knowledge which we derive from the use of our other senses. His idea of distance was so confused that it seemed as if all the spires, turrets, and minarets which he beheld were crowded forward upon his eyeballs and almost touching them. With a shriek of horror Ursel turned himself to the farther side, and cast his eyes upon a different scene. Here also he saw towers, steeples, and turrets, but they were those of the churches and public buildings beneath his feet reflected from the dazzling piece of water which formed the harbour of Constantinople, and which, from the abundance of wealth which it transported to the city, was well termed the Golden Horn. In one place this superb basin was lined with quays, where stately dromonds and argosies unloaded their wealth, while, by the shore of the haven, galleys, feluccas, and other small craft, idly flapped the singularly shaped and snow-white pinions which served them for sails. In other places the Golden Horn lay shrouded in a verdant mantle of trees, where the private gardens of wealthy or distinguished individuals, or places of public recreation, shot down upon and were bounded by the glassy waters.

On the Bosphorus, which might be seen in the distance, the little fleet of Tancred was lying in the same station they had gained during the night, which was fitted to command the opposite landing; this their general had preferred to a midnight descent upon Constantinople, not knowing whether, so coming, they might be received as friends or enemies. This delay, however, had given the Greeks an opportunity, either by the orders of Alexius, or the equally powerful mandates of some of the conspirators, to tow six ships of war, full of armed men and provided with the maritime offensive weapons peculiar to the Greeks at that period, which they had moored so as exactly to cover the place where the troops of Tancred must necessarily land.

This preparation gave some surprise to the valiant Tancred, who

did not know that such vessels had arrived in the harbour from Lemnos on the preceding night. The undaunted courage of that prince was, however, in no respect to be shaken by the degree of unexpected danger with which his adventure now appeared to be attended.

This splendid view, from the description of which we have in some degree digressed, was seen by the physician and Ursel from a terrace, the loftiest almost on the palace of the Blacquernal. To the cityward, it was bounded by a solid wall of considerable height, giving a resting-place for the roof of a lower building, which, sloping outward, broke to the view the vast height unobscured otherwise save by a high and massy balustrade, composed of bronze, which, to the havenward, sank sheer down upon an uninterrupted precipice.

No sooner, therefore, had Ursel turned his eyes that way, than, though placed far from the brink of the terrace, he exclaimed, with a shriek, "Save me—save me! if you are not indeed the destined executors of the Emperor's will."

"We are indeed such," said Douban, "to save, and if possible to bring you to complete recovery; but by no means to do you injury, or to suffer it to be offered by others."

"Guard me then from myself," said Ursel, "and save me from the reeling and insane desire which I feel to plunge myself into the abyss, to the edge of which you have guided me."

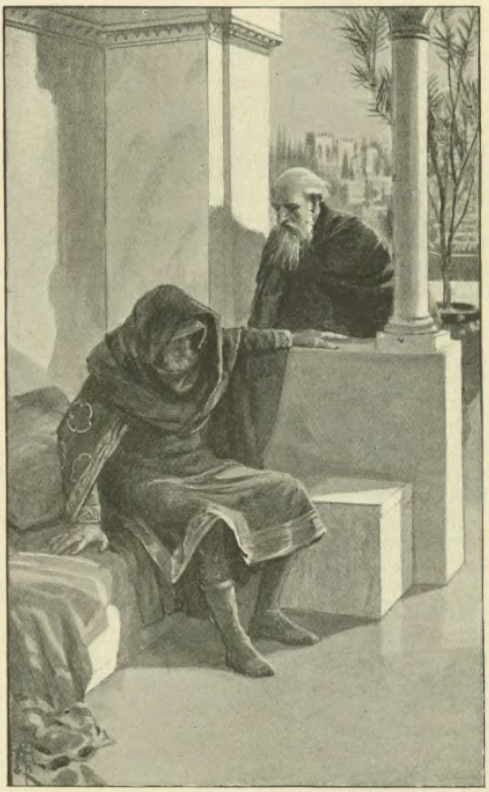
"Such a giddy and dangerous temptation is," said the physician, "common to those who have not for a long time looked down from precipitous heights, and are suddenly brought to them. Nature, however bounteous, hath not provided for the cessation of our faculties for years, and for their sudden resumption in full strength and vigour. An interval, longer, or shorter, must needs intervene. Can you not believe this terrace a safe station while you have my support and that of this faithful slave?"

"Certainly," said Ursel; "but permit me to turn my face towards this stone wall, for I cannot bear to look at the flimsy piece of wire which is the only battlement of defence that interposes betwixt me and the precipice." He spoke of the bronze balustrade, six feet high and massive in proportion. Thus saying, and holding fast by the physician's arm, Ursel, though himself a younger and more able man, trembled, and moved his feet as slowly as if made of lead, until he reached the sashed-door, where stood a kind of balcony-seat, in which he placed himself. "Here," he said, "will I remain."

"And here," said Douban, "will I make the communication of the Emperor, which it is necessary you should be prepared to reply to. It places you, you will observe, at your own disposal for liberty or captivity, but it conditions for your resigning that sweet but sinful morsel termed revenge, which, I must not conceal from you, chance appears willing to put into your hand. You know the degree of rivalry in which you have been held by the Emperor, and you know the measure

of evil you have sustained at his hand. The question is, Can you forgive what has taken place?"

"Let me wrap my head round with my mantle," said Ursel, "to dispel this dizziness which still oppresses my poor brain, and as soon as



"He sank upon the seat, muffled in the way which he described."

the power of recollection is granted to me, you shall know my sentiments."

He sank upon the seat, muffled in the way which he described, and after a few minutes' reflection, with a trepidation which argued the patient still to be under the nervous feeling of extreme horror mixed

with terror, he addressed Douban thus: "The operation of wrong and cruelty, in the moment when they are first inflicted, excites, of course, the utmost resentment of the sufferer; nor is there, perhaps, a passion which lives so long in his bosom as the natural desire of revenge. If, then, during the first month, when I lay stretched upon my bed of want and misery, you had offered me an opportunity of revenge upon my cruel oppressor, the remnant of miserable life which remained to me should have been willingly bestowed to purchase it. But a suffering of weeks, or even months, must not be compared in effect with that of years. For a short space of endurance, the body, as well as the mind, retains that vigorous habit which holds the prisoner still connected with life, and teaches him to thrill at the long-forgotten chain of hopes, of wishes, of disappointments, and mortifications, which affected his former existence. But the wounds become callous as they harden, and other and better feelings occupy their place, while they gradually die away in forgetfulness. The enjoyments, the amusements of this world, occupy no part of his time upon whom the gates of despair have once closed. I tell thee, my kind physician, that for a season, in an insane attempt to effect my liberty, I cut through a large portion of the living rock. But Heaven cured me of so foolish an idea; and if I did not actually come to love Alexius Comnenus—for how could that have been a possible effect in any rational state of my intellects?—yet as I became convinced of my own crimes, sins, and follies, the more and more I was also persuaded that Alexius was but the agent through whom Heaven exercised a dearly-purchased right of punishing me for my manifold offences and transgressions; and that it was not therefore upon the Emperor that my resentment ought to visit itself. And I can now say to thee that, so far as a man who has undergone so dreadful a change can be supposed to know his own mind, I feel no desire either to rival Alexius in a race for empire, or to avail myself of any of the various proffers which he proposes to me as the price of withdrawing my claim. Let him keep unpurchased the crown for which he has paid, in my opinion, a price which it is not worth."

"This is extraordinary stoicism, noble Ursel," answered the physician Douban. "Am I then to understand that you reject the fair offers of Alexius, and desire, instead of all which he is willing—nay, anxious to bestow—to be committed safely back to thy old blinded dungeon in the Blacquernal, that you may continue at ease those pietistic meditations which have already conducted thee to so extravagant a conclusion?"

"Physician," said Ursel, while a shuddering fit that affected his whole body testified his alarm at the alternative proposed—"one would imagine thine own profession might have taught thee that no mere mortal man, unless predestined to be a glorified saint, could ever prefer darkness to the light of day; blindness itself to the enjoyment of the power of sight; the pangs of starving to competent sustenance, or the

damps of a dungeon to the free air of God's creation. No! it may be virtue to do so, but to such a pitch mine does not soar. All I require of the Emperor for standing by him with all the power my name can give him at this crisis is, that he will provide for my reception as a monk in some of those pleasant and well-endowed seminaries of piety to which his devotion, or his fears, have given rise. Let me not be again the object of his suspicion, the operation of which is more dreadful than that of being the object of his hate. Forgotten by power, as I have myself lost the remembrance of those that wielded it, let me find my way to the grave, unnoticed, unconstrained, at liberty, in possession of my dim and disused organs of sight, and, above all, at peace."

"If such be thy serious and earnest wish, noble Ursel," said the physician, "I myself have no hesitation to warrant to thee the full accomplishment of thy religious and moderate desires. But, bethink thee, thou art once more an inhabitant of the court in which thou mayst obtain what thou wilt to-day; while to-morrow, shouldst thou regret thy indifference, it may be thy utmost entreaty will not suffice to gain for thee the slightest extension of thy present conditions."

"Be it so," said Ursel; "I will then stipulate for another condition, which indeed has only reference to this day. I will solicit his Imperial Majesty, with all humility, to spare me the pain of a personal treaty between himself and me, and that he will be satisfied with the solemn assurance that I am most willing to do in his favour all that he is desirous of dictating; while, on the other hand, I desire only the execution of those moderate conditions of my future aliment which I have already told thee at length."

"But wherefore," said Douban, "shouldst thou be afraid of announcing to the Emperor thy disposition to an agreement which cannot be esteemed otherwise than extremely moderate on thy part? Indeed, I fear the Emperor will insist on a brief personal conference."

"I am not ashamed," said Ursel, "to confess the truth. It is true that I have, or think I have, renounced what the Scripture calls the pride of life; but the old Adam still lives within us, and maintains against the better part of our nature an inextinguishable quarrel, easy to be aroused from its slumber, but as difficult to be again couched in peace. While last night I but half understood that mine enemy was in my presence, and while my faculties performed but half their duty in recalling his deceitful and hated accents, did not my heart throb in my bosom with all the agitation of a taken bird, and shall I again have to enter into a personal treaty with the man who, be his general conduct what it may, has been the constant and unprovoked cause of my unequalled misery? Douban, no!—to listen to his voice again were, to hear an alarm sounded to every violent and vindictive passion of my heart; and though, may Heaven so help me as my intentions towards him are upright, yet it is impossible

for me to listen to his professions with a chance of safety either to him or to myself."

"If you be so minded," replied Douban, "I shall only repeat to him your stipulation, and you must swear to him that you will strictly observe it. Without this being done, it must be difficult, or perhaps impossible, to settle the league of which both are desirous."

"Amen!" said Ursel; "and as I am pure in my purpose, and resolved to keep it to the uttermost, so may Heaven guard me from the influence of precipitate revenge, ancient grudge, or new quarrel!"

An authoritative knock at the door of the sleeping chamber was now heard, and Ursel, relieved by more powerful feelings from the giddiness of which he had complained, walked firmly into the bedroom, and seating himself, waited with averted eyes the entrance of the person who demanded admittance, and who proved to be no other than Alexius Comnenus.

The Emperor appeared at the door in a warlike dress, suited for the decoration of a prince who was to witness a combat in the lists fought out before him.

"Sage Douban," he said, "has our esteemed prisoner, Ursel, made his choice between our peace and enmity?"

"He hath, my lord," replied the physician, "embraced the lot of that happy portion of mankind whose hearts and lives are devoted to the service of your Majesty's government."

"He will then this day," continued the Emperor, "render me the office of putting down all those who may pretend to abet insurrection in his name, and under pretext of his wrongs?"

"He will, my lord," replied the physician, "act to the fullest the part which you require."

"And in what way," said the Emperor, adopting his most gracious tone of voice, "would our faithful Ursel desire that services like these, rendered in the hour of extreme need, should be acknowledged by the Emperor?"

"Simply," answered Douban, "by saying nothing upon the subject. He desires only that all jealousies between you and him may be henceforth forgotten, and that he may be admitted into one of your Highness's monastic institutions, with leave to dedicate the rest of his life to the worship of Heaven and its saints."

"Hath he persuaded thee of this, Douban?" said the Emperor, in a low and altered voice. "By Heaven! when I consider from what prison he was brought, and in what guise he inhabited it, I cannot believe in this gall-less disposition. He must at least speak to me himself, ere I can believe, in some degree, the transformation of the fiery Ursel into a being so little capable of feeling the ordinary impulses of mankind."

"Hear me, Alexius Comnenus," said the prisoner; "and so may thine own prayers to Heaven find access and acceptation, as thou

believest the words which I speak to thee in simplicity of heart. If thine empire of Greece were made of coined gold it would hold out no bait for my acceptance; nor, I thank Heaven, have even the injuries I have experienced at thy hand, cruel and extensive as they have been, impressed upon me the slightest desire of requiting treachery with treachery. Think of me as thou wilt, so thou seek'st not again to exchange words with me; and believe me, that when thou hast put me under the most rigid of thy ecclesiastical foundations, the discipline, the fare, and the vigils, will be far superior to the existence falling to the share of those whom the King delights to honour, and who therefore must afford the King their society whenever they are summoned to do so."

"It is hardly for me," said the physician, "to interpose in so high a matter; yet, as trusted both by the noble Ursel, and by his highness the Emperor, I have made a brief abstract of these short conditions to be kept by the high parties towards each other, *sub crimine falsi.*"

The Emperor protracted the intercourse with Ursel, until he more fully explained to him the occasion which he should have that very day for his services. When they parted, Alexius, with a great show of affection, embraced his late prisoner, while it required all the self-command and stoicism of Ursel to avoid expressing in plain terms the extent to which he abhorred the person who thus caressed him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"O Conspiracy!
Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,
When evils are most free? O, then, by day,
Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, Conspiracy;
Hide it in smiles and affability:
For if thou path thy native semblance on,
Not Erebus itself were dim enough
To hide thee from prevention."

Julius Cæsar.]

THE important morning at last arrived on which, by the imperial proclamation, the combat between the Cæsar and Robert Count of Paris was appointed to take place. This was a circumstance in a great measure foreign to the Grecian manners, and to which, therefore, the people annexed different ideas from those which were associated with the same solemn decision of God, as the Latins called it, by the Western nations. The consequence was a vague, but excessive agitation among the people, who connected the extraordinary strife which they were to witness with the various causes which had been whispered abroad as likely to give occasion to some general insurrection of a great and terrible nature.

By the imperial order, regular lists had been prepared for the combat, with opposite gates, or entrances, as was usual, for the admittance of the two champions; and it was understood that the appeal was to be made to the Divinity by each, according to the forms prescribed by the Church of which the combatants were respectively members. The situation of these lists was on the side of the shore adjoining on the west to the continent. At no great distance, the walls of the city were seen, of

various architecture, composed of lime and of stone, and furnished with no less than four-and-twenty gates, or posterns, five of which regarded the land, and nineteen the water. All this formed a beautiful prospect, much of which is still visible. The town itself is about nineteen miles in circumference; and as it is on all sides surrounded with lofty cypresses its general appearance is that of a city arising out of a stately wood of these magnificent trees, partly shrouding the pinnacles, obelisks, and minarets, which then marked the site of many noble Christian temples; but now, generally speaking, intimate the position of as many Mahomedan mosques.

These lists, for the convenience of spectators, were surrounded on all sides by long rows of seats, sloping downwards. In the middle of these seats, and exactly opposite the centre of the lists, was a high throne, erected for the Emperor himself; and which was separated from the more vulgar galleries by a circuit of wooden barricades, which an experienced eye could perceive might, in case of need, be made serviceable for purposes of defence.

The lists were sixty yards in length, by perhaps about forty in breadth, and these afforded ample space for the exercise of the combat, both on horseback and on foot. Numerous bands of the Greek citizens began, with the very break of day, to issue from the gates and posterns of the city to examine and wonder at the construction of the lists, pass their criticisms upon the purposes of the peculiar parts of the fabric, and occupy places to secure them for the spectacle. Shortly after arrived a large band of those soldiers who were called the Roman Immortals. These entered without ceremony, and placed themselves on either hand of the wooden barricade which fenced the Emperor's seat. Some of them took even a greater liberty; for, affecting to be pressed against the boundary, there were individuals who approached the partition itself, and seemed to meditate climbing over it and placing themselves on the same side with the Emperor. Some old domestic slaves of the household now showed themselves, as if for the purpose of preserving this sacred circle for Alexius and his court; and, in proportion as the Immortals began to show themselves encroaching and turbulent, the strength of the defenders of the prohibited precincts seemed gradually to increase.

There was, though scarcely to be observed, besides the grand access to the imperial seat from without, another opening also from the outside, secured by a very strong door, by which different persons received admission beneath the seats destined for the imperial party. These persons, by their length of limb, breadth of shoulders, by the fur of their cloaks, and especially by the redoubted battle-axes which all of them bore, appeared to be Varangians; but, although neither dressed in their usual habit of pomp, nor in their more effectual garb of war, still, when narrowly examined, they might be seen to possess their usual offensive weapons. These men, entering in separate and

straggling parties, might be observed to join the slaves of the interior of the palace in opposing the intrusion of the Immortals upon the seat of the Emperor and the benches around. Two or three Immortals, who had actually made good their frolic and climbed over the division, were flung back again, very unceremoniously, by the barbaric strength and sinewy arms of the Varangians.

The people around, and in the adjacent galleries, most of whom had the air of citizens in their holiday dresses, commented a good deal on these proceedings, and were inclined strongly to make part with the Immortals. "It was a shame to the Emperor," they said, "to encourage these British barbarians to interpose themselves by violence between his person and the Immortal cohorts of the city, who were in some sort his own children."

Stephanos, the gymnastic, whose bulky strength and stature rendered him conspicuous amid this party, said, without hesitation, "If there are two people here who will join in saying that the Immortals are unjustly deprived of their right of guarding the Emperor's person, here is the hand that shall place them beside the imperial chair."

"Not so," quoth a centurion of the Immortals, whom we have already introduced to our readers by the name of Harpax—"Not so, Stephanos; that happy time may arrive, but it is not yet come, my gem of the circus. Thou knowest that on this occasion it is one of these Counts, or Western Franks, who undertakes the combat; and the Varangians, who call these people their enemies, have some reason to claim a precedency in guarding the lists, which it might not at this moment be convenient to dispute with them. Why, man, if thou wert half so witty as thou art long, thou wouldst be sensible that it were bad woodmanship to raise the hollo upon the game, ere it had been driven within compass of the nets."

While the athlete rolled his huge grey eyes as if to conjure out the sense of this intimation, his little friend Lysimachus, the artist, putting himself to pain to stand upon his tiptoe and look intelligent, said, approaching as near as he could to Harpax's ear, "Thou mayst trust me, gallant centurion, that this man of mould and muscle shall neither start like a babbling hound on a false scent, nor become mute and inert when the general signal is given. But tell me," said he, speaking very low, and for that purpose mounting a bench, which brought him on a level with the centurion's ear, "would it not have been better that a strong guard of the valiant Immortals had been placed in this wooden citadel to ensure the object of the day?"

"Without question," said the centurion, "it was so meant; but these strolling Varangians have altered their station of their own authority."

"Were it not well," said Lysimachus, "that you, who are greatly more numerous than the barbarians, should begin a fray before more of these strangers arrive?"

"Content ye, friend," said the centurion coldly, "we know our time. An attack commenced too early would be worse than thrown away, nor would an opportunity occur of executing our project in the fitting time, if an alarm were prematurely given at this moment."

So saying, he shuffled off among his fellow-soldiers, so as to avoid suspicious intercourse with such persons as were only concerned with the civic portion of the conspirators.

As the morning advanced and the sun took a higher station in the horizon, the various persons whom curiosity, or some more decided motive, brought to see the proposed combat, were seen streaming from different parts of the town, and rushing to occupy such accommodation as the circuit round the lists afforded them. In their road to the place where preparation for combat was made, they had to ascend a sort of cape, which, in the form of a small hill, projected into the Hellespont, and the butt of which, connecting it with the shore, afforded a considerable ascent, and of course a more commanding view of the strait between Europe and Asia, than either the immediate vicinity of the city, or the still lower ground upon which the lists were erected. In passing this height, the earlier visitants of the lists made little or no halt; but after a time, when it became obvious that those who had hurried forward to the place of combat were lingering there without any object or occupation, they that followed them in the same route, with natural curiosity, paid a tribute tc the landscape, bestowing some attention on its beauty, and paused to see what auguries could be collected from the water, which were likely to have any concern in indicating the fate of the events that were to take place. Some straggling seamen were the first who remarked that a squadron of the Greek small craft (being that of Tancred) were in the act of making their way from Asia and threatening a descent upon Constantinople.

"It is strange," said a person, by rank the captain of a galley, "that these small vessels, which were ordered to return to Constantinople as soon as they disembarked the Latins, should have remained so long at Scutari, and should not be rowing back to the imperial city until this time, on the second day after their departure from thence."

"I pray to Heaven," said another of the same profession, "that these seamen may come alone. It seems to me as if their ensign-staffs, bowsprits, and topmasts, were decorated with the same ensigns, or nearly the same, with those which the Latins displayed upon them, when, by the Emperor's order, they were transported towards Palestine; so methinks the voyage back again resembles that of a fleet of merchant vessels, who have been prevented from discharging their cargo at the place of their destination."

"There is little good," said one of the politicians whom we formerly noticed, "in dealing with such commodities, whether they are imported or exported. Yon ample banner which streams over

the foremost galley, intimates the presence of a chieftain of no small rank among the Counts, whether it be for valour or for nobility."

The seafaring leader added, with the voice of one who hints alarming tidings, "They seem to have got to a point in the straits as high as will enable them to run down with the tide and clear the cape which we stand on, although with what purpose they aim to land so close beneath the walls of the city, he is a wiser man than I who pretends to determine."

"Assuredly," returned his comrade, "the intention is not a kind one. The wealth of the city has temptations to a poor people, who only value the iron which they possess as affording them the means of procuring the gold which they covet."

"Ay, brother," answered Demetrius the politician, "but see you not, lying at anchor within this bay which is formed by the cape, and at the very point where these heretics are likely to be carried by the tide, six strong vessels, having the power of sending forth, not merely showers of darts and arrows, but of Grecian fire, as it is called, from their hollow decks? If these Frank gentry continue directing their course upon the imperial city, being, as they are,

"'propago
Contemptrix Superûm sané, sævæque avidissima cædis,
Et violenta;'*

we shall speedily see a combat better worth witnessing than that announced by the great trumpet of the Varangians. If you love me, let us sit down here for a moment and see how this matter is to end."

"An excellent motion, my ingenious friend," said Lascaris, which was the name of the other citizen; "but, bethink you, shall we not be in danger from the missiles with which the audacious Latins will not fail to return the Greek fire, if, according to your conjecture, it shall be poured upon them by the imperial squadron?"

"That is not ill argued, my friend," said Demetrius; "but know that you have to do with a man who has been in such extremities before now; and if such a discharge should open from the sea I would propose to you to step back some fifty yards inland, and thus to interpose the very crest of the cape between us and the discharge of missiles; a mere child might thus learn to face them without any alarm."

"You are a wise man, neighbour," said Lascaris, "and possess such a mixture of valour and knowledge as becomes a man whom a friend might be supposed safely to risk his life with. There be those, for instance, who cannot show you the slightest glimpse of what is going on without bringing you within peril of your life; whereas you, my worthy friend Demetrius, between your accurate knowledge of military affairs and your regard for your friend, are sure to show him all

* Ovid. Met.

that is to be seen without the least risk to a person who is naturally unwilling to think of exposing himself to injury. But, Holy Virgin! what is the meaning of that red flag which the Greek Admiral has this instant hoisted?"

"Why, you see, neighbour," answered Demetrius, "yonder Western heretic continues to advance without minding the various signs which our Admiral has made to him to desist, and now he hoists the bloody colours, as if a man should clench his fist and say, If you persevere in your uncivil intention I will do so and so."

"By St. Sophia," said Lascaris, "and that is giving him fair warning. But what is it the Imperial Admiral is about to do?"

"Run! run! friend Lascaris," said Demetrius, "or you will see more of that than perchance you have any curiosity for."

Accordingly, to add the strength of example to precept, Demetrius himself girt up his loins, and retreated with the most edifying speed to the opposite side of the ridge, accompanied by the greater part of the crowd, who had tarried there to witness the contest which the newsmonger promised, and were determined to take his word for their own safety. The sound and sight which had alarmed Demetrius was the discharge of a large portion of Greek fire, which perhaps may be best compared to one of those immense Congreve rockets of the present day, which takes on its shoulders a small grapnel or anchor, and proceeds groaning through the air, like a fiend over-burdened by the mandate of some inexorable magician, and of which the operation was so terrifying, that the crews of the vessels attacked by this strange weapon frequently forsook every means of defence, and ran themselves ashore. One of the principal ingredients of this dreadful fire was supposed to be naphtha, or the bitumen which is collected on the banks of the Dead Sea, and which, when in a state of ignition, could only be extinguished by a very singular mixture, and which it was not likely to come in contact with. It produced a thick smoke and loud explosion, and was capable, says Gibbon, of communicating its flames with equal vehemence in descent or lateral progress.* In sieges, it was poured from the ramparts, or launched, like our bombs, in red-hot balls of stone or iron, or it was darted in flax twisted round arrows and in javelins. It was considered as a state secret of the greatest importance; and for well-nigh four centuries it was unknown to the Mahometans. But at length the composition was discovered by the Saracens, and used by them for repelling the crusaders, and overpowering the Greeks, upon whose side it had at one time been the most formidable implement of defence. Some exaggeration we must allow for a barbarous period; but there seems no doubt that the general description of the crusader Joinville should be admitted as correct:—"It came flying through the air," says that good knight, "like a winged dragon, about the thickness of a hogshead, with the report of thunder and the speed

* For a full account of the Greek fire, see Gibbon, chap. liii.

of lightning, and the darkness of the night was dispelled by this horrible illumination."

Not only the bold Demetrius and his pupil Lascaris, but all the crowd whom they influenced, fled manfully when the commodore of the Greeks fired the first discharge; and as the other vessels in the squadron followed his example the heavens were filled with the unusual and outrageous noise, while the smoke was so thick as to darken the very air. As the fugitives passed the crest of the hill, they saw the seaman, whom we formerly mentioned as a spectator, snugly reclining under cover of a dry ditch, where he managed so as to secure himself as far as possible from any accident. He could not, however, omit breaking his jest on the politicians.

"What, ho!" he cried, "my good friends," without raising himself above the counterscarp of his ditch, "will you not remain upon your station long enough to finish that hopeful lecture upon battle by sea and land, which you had so happy an opportunity of commencing? Believe me, the noise is more alarming than hurtful; the fire is all pointed in a direction opposite to yours, and if one of those dragons which you see does happen to fly landward instead of seaward, it is but the mistake of some cabin-boy, who has used his linstock with more willingness than ability."

Demetrius and Lascaris just heard enough of the naval hero's harangue to acquaint them with the new danger with which they might be assailed by the possible misdirection of the weapons, and, rushing down towards the lists at the head of a crowd half desperate with fear, they hastily propagated the appalling news that the Latins were coming back from Asia with the purpose of landing in arms, pillaging, and burning the city.

The uproar, in the meantime, of this unexpected occurrence, was such as altogether to vindicate, in public opinion, the reported cause, however exaggerated. The thunder of the Greek fire came successively, one hard upon the other, and each, in its turn, spread a blot of black smoke upon the face of the landscape, which, thickened by so many successive clouds, seemed at last, like that raised by a sustained fire of modern artillery, to overshadow the whole horizon.

The small squadron of Tancred were completely hid from view in the surging volumes of darkness, which the breath of the weapons of the enemy had spread around him; and it seemed by a red light, which began to show itself among the thickest of the veil of darkness, that one of the flotilla at least had caught fire. Yet the Latins resisted, with an obstinacy worthy of their own courage, and the fame of their celebrated leader. Some advantage they had, on account of their small size and their lowness in the water, as well as the clouded state of the atmosphere, which rendered them difficult marks for the fire of the Greeks.

To increase these advantages, Tancred, as well by boats as by the kind of rude signals made use of at the period, dispersed orders to his

"Tancred himself set a noble example" (p. 341).

fleet, that each bark, disregarding the fate of the others, should press forward individually, and that the men from each should be put on shore wheresoever and howsoever they could effect that manœuvre. Tancred himself set a noble example; he was on board a stout vessel, fenced in some degree against the effect of the Greek fire by being in a great measure covered with raw hides, which hides had also been recently steeped in water. This vessel contained upwards of a hundred valiant warriors, several of them of knightly order, who had all night toiled at the humble labours of the oar, and now in the morning applied their chivalrous hands to the arblast and to the bow, which were in general accounted the weapons of persons of a lower rank. Thus armed, and thus manned, Prince Tancred bestowed upon his bark the full velocity which wind, and tide, and oar, could enable her to obtain, and placing her in the situation to profit by them as much as his maritime skill could direct, he drove with the speed of lightning among the vessels of Lemnos, plying on either side bows, cross-bows, javelins, and military missiles of every kind, with the greater advantage that the Greeks, trusting to their artificial fire, had omitted arming themselves with other weapons; so that when the valiant crusader bore down on them with so much fury, repaying the terrors of their fire with a storm of bolts and arrows no less formidable, they began to feel that their own advantage was much less than they had supposed, and that, like most other dangers, the maritime fire of the Greeks, when undauntedly confronted, lost at least one-half of its terrors. The Grecian sailors, too, when they observed the vessels approach so near, filled with the steel-clad Latins, began to shrink from a contest to be maintained hand to hand with so terrible an enemy.

By degrees, smoke began to issue from the sides of the great Grecian argosy, and the voice of Tancred announced to his soldiers that the Grecian Admiral's vessel had taken fire, owing to negligence in the management of the means of destruction she possessed, and that all they had now to do was to maintain such a distance as to avoid sharing her fate. Sparkles and flashes of flame were next seen leaping from place to place on board of the great hulk, as if the element had had the sense and purpose of spreading wider the consternation, and disabling the few who still paid attention to the commands of their Admiral, and endeavoured to extinguish the fire. The consciousness of the combustible nature of the freight began to add despair to terror; from the boltsprit, the rigging, the yards, the sides, and every part of the vessel, the unfortunate crew were seen dropping themselves, to exchange for the most part a watery death for one by the more dreadful agency of fire. The crew of Tancred's bark, ceasing, by that generous prince's commands, to offer any additional annoyance to an enemy who was at once threatened by the perils of the ocean and of conflagration, ran their vessel ashore in a smooth part of the bay, and jumping into the shallow sea, made the

land without difficulty; many of their steeds being, by the exertions of the owners, and the docility of the animals, brought ashore at the same time with their masters. Their commander lost no time in forming their serried ranks into a phalanx of lancers, few indeed at first, but perpetually increasing as ship after ship of the little flotilla ran ashore, or, having more deliberately moored their barks, landed their men and joined their companions.

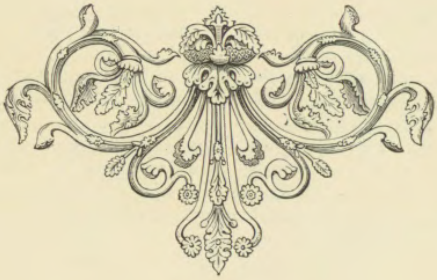
The cloud which had been raised by the conflict was now driven

"The standard had been borne ashore by the Prince's favourite page" (p. 343).

to leeward before the wind, and the strait exhibited only the relics of the combat. Here tossed upon the billows the scattered and broken remains of one or two of the Latin vessels which had been burnt at the commencement of the combat, though their crews, by the exertions of their comrades, had in general been saved. Lower down were seen the remaining five vessels of the Lemnos squadron, holding a disorderly and difficult retreat, with the purpose of gaining the harbour of Constantinople. In the place so late the scene of combat lay moored the hulk of the Grecian Admiral, burnt to the water's edge, and still

sending forth a black smoke from its scathed beams and planks. The flotilla of Tancred, busied in discharging its troops, lay irregularly scattered along the bay, the men making ashore as they could, and taking their course to join the standard of their leader. Various black substances floated on the surface of the water, nearer, or more distant to the shore; some proved to be the wreck of the vessels which had been destroyed, and others, more ominous still, the lifeless bodies of mariners who had fallen in the conflict.

The standard had been borne ashore by the Prince's favourite page, Ernest of Apulia, so soon as the keel of Tancred's galley had grazed upon the sand. It was then pitched on the top of that elevated cape between Constantinople and the lists, where Lascaris, Demetrius, and other gossips, had held their station at the commencement of the engagement, but from which all had fled, between the mingled dread of the Greek fire and the missiles of the Latin crusaders.



CHAPTER XXX.

SHEATHED in complete armour, and supporting with his right hand the standard of his fathers, Tancred remained with his handful of warriors like so many statues of steel, expecting some sort of attack from the Grecian party which had occupied the lists, or from the numbers whom the city gates began now to pour forth—soldiers some of them, and others citizens, many of whom were arrayed as if for conflict. These persons, alarmed by the various accounts which were given of the combatants, and the progress of the fight, rushed towards the standard of Prince Tancred, with the intention of beating it to the earth, and dispersing the guards who owed it homage and defence. But if the reader shall have happened to have ridden at any time through a pastoral country, with a dog of a noble race following him, he must have remarked, in the deference ultimately paid to the high-bred animal by the shepherd's cur as he crosses the lonely glen, of which the latter conceives himself the lord and guardian, something very similar to the demeanour of the incensed Greeks, when they approached near to the little band of Franks. At the first symptom of the intrusion of a stranger the dog of the shepherd starts from his slumbers and rushes towards the noble intruder with a clamorous declaration of war; but when the diminution of distance between them shows to the aggressor the size and strength of his opponent he becomes like a cruiser who, in a chase, has, to his surprise and alarm, found two tier of guns opposed to him instead of one. He halts—suspends his clamorous yelping, and, in fine, ingloriously retreats to his master, with all the dishonourable marks of positively declining the combat.

It was in this manner that the troops of the noisy Greeks, with much hallooing and many a boastful shout, hastened both from the

town and from the lists, with the apparent intention of sweeping from the field the few companions of Tancred. As they advanced, however, within the power of remarking the calm and regular order of those men who had landed and arranged themselves under this noble chieftain's banner, their minds were altogether changed as to the resolution of instant combat; their advance became an uncertain and staggering gait; their heads were more frequently turned back to the point from which they came, than towards the enemy; and their desire to provoke an instant scuffle vanished totally, when there did not appear the least symptom that their opponents cared about the matter.

It added to the extreme confidence with which the Latins kept their ground, that they were receiving frequent, though small reinforcements from their comrades, who were landing by detachments all along the beach; and that, in the course of a short hour, their amount had been raised, on horseback and foot, to a number, allowing for a few casualties, not much less than that which set sail from Scutari.

Another reason why the Latins remained unassailed, was certainly the indisposition of the two principal armed parties on shore to enter into a quarrel with them. The guards of every kind, who were faithful to the Emperor, and more especially the Varangians, had their orders to remain firm at their posts, some in the lists, and others at various places of rendezvous in Constantinople, where their presence was necessary to prevent the effects of the sudden insurrection which Alexius knew to be meditated against him. These, therefore, made no hostile demonstration towards the band of Latins, nor was it the purpose of the Emperor they should do so.

On the other hand, the greater part of the Immortal Guards, and those citizens who were prepared to play a part in the conspiracy, had been impressed by the agents of the deceased Agelastes with the opinion that this band of Latins, commanded by Tancred, the relative of Bohemond, had been despatched by the latter to their assistance. These men, therefore, stood still, and made no attempt to guide or direct the popular efforts of such as inclined to attack these unexpected visitors; in which purpose, therefore, no very great party were united, while the majority were willing enough to find an apology for remaining quiet.

In the meantime, the Emperor, from his palace of Blacquernal, observed what passed upon the straits, and beheld his navy from Lemnos totally foiled in their attempt, by means of the Greek fire, to check the intended passage of Tancred and his men. He had no sooner seen the leading ship of this squadron begin to beacon the darkness with its own fire, than the Emperor formed a secret resolution to disown the unfortunate Admiral, and make peace with the Latins, if that should be absolutely necessary, by sending them his head. He had hardly, therefore, seen the flames burst forth, and the rest of the vessels retreat from their moorings, than in his own mind the doom of the

unfortunate Phraortes, for such was the name of the Admiral, was signed and sealed.

Achilles Tatius, at the same instant, determining to keep a close eye upon the Emperor at this important crisis, came precipitately into the palace, with an appearance of great alarm.

"My Lord!—my Imperial Lord! I am unhappy to be the messenger of such unlucky news; but the Latins have in great numbers succeeded in crossing the strait from Scutari. The Lemnos squadron endeavoured to stop them, as was last night determined upon in the Imperial Council of War. By a heavy discharge of the Greek fire one or two of the crusaders' vessels were consumed, but by far the greater number of them pushed on their course, burnt the leading ship of the unfortunate Phraortes, and it is strongly reported he has himself perished, with almost all his men. The rest have cut their cables and abandoned the defence of the passage of the Hellespont."

"And you, Achilles Tatius," said the Emperor, "with what purpose is it that you now bring me this melancholy news, at a period so late when I cannot amend the consequences?"

"Under favour, most gracious Emperor," replied the conspirator, not without colouring and stammering, "such was not my intention—I had hoped to submit a plan, by which I might easily have prepared the way for correcting this little error."

"Well, your plan, sir?" said the Emperor dryly.

"With your sacred Majesty's leave," said the Acolyte, "I would myself have undertaken instantly to lead against this Tancred and his Italians the battle-axes of the faithful Varangian guard, who will make no more account of the small number of Franks who have come ashore, than the farmer holds of the hordes of rats and mice, and such like mischievous vermin, who have harboured in his granaries."

"And what mean you," said the Emperor, "that I am to do while my Anglo-Saxons fight for my sake?"

"Your Majesty," replied Achilles, not exactly satisfied with the dry and caustic manner in which the Emperor addressed him, "may put yourself at the head of the Immortal cohorts of Constantinople; and I am your security, that you may either perfect the victory over the Latins, or at least redeem the most distant chance of a defeat, by advancing at the head of this choice body of domestic troops, should the day appear doubtful."

"You, yourself, Achilles Tatius," returned the Emperor, "have repeatedly assured us that these Immortals retain a perverse attachment to our rebel Ursel. How is it, then, you would have us entrust our defence to these bands, when we have engaged our valiant Varangians in the proposed conflict with the flower of the Western army? Did you think of this risk, Sir Follower?"

Achilles Tatius, much alarmed at an intimation indicative of his purpose being known, answered, "That in his haste he had been more

anxious to recommend the plan which should expose his own person to the greater danger, than that perhaps which was most attended with personal safety to his Imperial Master."

"I thank you for so doing," said the Emperor; "you have anticipated my wishes, though it is not in my power at present to follow the advice you have given me. I would have been well contented, undoubtedly, had these Latins measured their way over the strait again, as suggested by last night's council; but since they have arrived, and stand embattled on our shores, it is better that we pay them with money and with spoil, than with the lives of our gallant

"The two generals had, therefore, no other alternative" (p. 348).

subjects. We cannot, after all, believe that they come with any serious intention of doing us injury; it is but the insane desire of witnessing feats of battle and single combat, which is to them the breath of their nostrils, that can have impelled them to this partial counter-march. I impose upon you, Achilles Tatius, combining the Protospathaire in the same commission with you, the duty of riding up to yonder standard and learning of their chief, called the Prince Tancred, if he is there in person, the purpose of his return, and the cause of his entering into debate with Phraortes and the Lemnos squadron. If they send us any reasonable excuse, we shall not be averse to receive it at their hands; for we have not made so many

sacrifices for the preservation of peace, to break forth into war, if, after all, so great an evil can be avoided. Thou wilt receive, therefore, with a candid and complacent mind, such apologies as they may incline to bring forward; and, be assured that the sight of this puppet-show of a single combat, will be enough of itself to banish every other consideration from the reflection of these giddy crusaders."

A knock was at this moment heard at the door of the Emperor's apartment; and upon the word been given to enter, the Protospathaire made his appearance. He was arrayed in a splendid suit of ancient, Roman-fashioned armour. The want of a visor left his countenance entirely visible; which, pale and anxious as it was, did not well become the martial crest and dancing plume with which it was decorated. He received the commission already mentioned with the less alacrity, because the Acolyte was added to him as his colleague; for, as the reader may have observed, these two officers were of separate factions in the army, and on indifferent terms with each other. Neither did the Acolyte consider his being united in commission with the Protospathaire, as a mark either of the Emperor's confidence, or of his own safety. He was, however, in the meantime, in the Blacquernal, where the slaves of the interior made not the least hesitation, when ordered, to execute any officer of the court. The two generals had, therefore, no other alternative, than that which is allowed to two greyhounds who are reluctantly coupled together. The hope of Achilles Tatius was, that he might get safely through his mission to Tancred, after which he thought the successful explosion of the conspiracy might take place and have its course, either as a matter desired and countenanced by those Latins, or passed over as a thing in which they took no interest on either side.

By the parting order of the Emperor, they were to mount on horseback at the sounding of the great Varangian trumpet, put themselves at the head of those Anglo-Saxon guards in the courtyard of their barrack, and await the Emperor's further orders.

There was something in this arrangement which pressed hard on the conscience of Achilles Tatius, yet he was at a loss to justify his apprehensions to himself, unless from a conscious feeling of his own guilt. He felt, however, that in being detained, under pretence of an honourable mission, at the head of the Varangians, he was deprived of the liberty of disposing of himself, by which he had hoped to communicate with the Cæsar and Hereward, whom he reckoned upon as his active accomplices, not knowing that the first was at this moment a prisoner in the Blacquernal, where Alexius had arrested him in the apartments of the Empress, and that the second was the most important support of Comnenus during the whole of that eventful day.

When the gigantic trumpet of the Varangian guards sent forth its deep signal through the city, the Protospathaire hurried Achilles along with him to the rendezvous of the Varangians, and on the way said

to him, in an easy and indifferent tone, "As the Emperor is in the field in person, you, his representative, or Follower, will of course transmit no orders to the body-guard, except such as shall receive their origin from himself, so that you will consider your authority as this day suspended."

"I regret," said Achilles, "that there should have seemed any cause for such precautions; I had hoped my own truth and fidelity—but—I am obsequious to his imperial pleasure in all things."

"Such are his orders," said the other officer, "and you know under what penalty obedience is enforced."

"If I did not," said Achilles, "the composition of this body of guards would remind me, since it comprehends not only great part of those Varangians, who are the immediate defenders of the Emperor's throne, but those slaves of the interior, who are the executioners of his pleasure."

To this the Protospathaire returned no answer, while the more closely the Acolyte looked upon the guard which attended, to the unusual number of nearly three thousand men, the more had he reason to believe that he might esteem himself fortunate, if, by the intervention of either the Cæsar, Agelastes, or Hereward, he could pass to the conspirators a signal to suspend the intended explosion, which seemed to be provided against by the Emperor with unusual caution. He would have given the full dream of empire, with which he had been for a short time lulled asleep, to have seen but a glimpse of the azure plume of Nicephorus, the white mantle of the philosopher, or even a glimmer of Hereward's battle-axe. No such objects could be seen anywhere, and not a little was the faithless Follower displeased to see that whichever way he turned his eyes, those of the Protospathaire, but especially of the trusty domestic officers of the empire, seemed to follow and watch their occupation.

Amidst the numerous soldiers whom he saw on all sides, his eye did not recognise a single man with whom he could exchange a friendly or confidential glance, and he stood in all that agony of terror, which is rendered the more discomforting, because the traitor is conscious that, beset by various foes, his own fears are the most likely of all to betray him. Internally, as the danger seemed to increase, and as his alarmed imagination attempted to discern new reasons for it, he could only conclude that either one of the three principal conspirators, or at least some of the inferiors, had turned informers; and his doubt was, whether he should not screen his own share of what had been premeditated, by flinging himself at the feet of the Emperor and making a full confession. But still the fear of being premature in having recourse to such a base means of saving himself, joined to the absence of the Emperor, united to keep within his lips a secret, which concerned not only all his future fortunes, but life itself. He was in the meantime, therefore, plunged as it were in a sea of trouble and uncertainty, while the specks of land, which seemed to promise him refuge, were distant, dimly seen, and extremely difficulty of attainment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"To-morrow—oh, that's sudden! Spare him, spare him;
He's not prepared to die."

SHAKSPEARE.

AT the moment when Achilles Tatius, with a feeling of much insecurity, awaited the unwinding of the perilous skein of state politics, a private council of the imperial family was held in the hall termed the Temple of the Muses, repeatedly distinguished as the apartment in which the Princess Anna Comnena was wont to make her evening recitations to those who were permitted the honour of hearing prelections of her history. The council consisted of the Empress Irene, the Princess herself, and the Emperor, with the Patriarch of the Greek Church, as a sort of mediator between a course of severity and a dangerous degree of lenity.

"Tell not me, Irene," said the Emperor, "of the fine things attached to the praise of mercy. Here have I sacrificed my just revenge over my rival Ursel, and what good do I obtain by it? Why, the old obstinate man, instead of being tractable, and sensible of the generosity which has spared his life and eyes, can be with difficulty brought to exert himself in favour of the Prince to whom he owes them. I used to think that eyesight and the breath of life were things which one would preserve at any sacrifice; but, on the contrary, I now believe men value them like mere toys. Talk not to me, therefore, of the gratitude to be excited by saving this ungrateful cub; and believe me, girl," turning to Anna, "that not only will all my subjects, should I follow your advice, laugh at me for sparing a man so predetermined to work my ruin, but even thou thyself wilt be the first

to upbraid me with the foolish kindness thou art now so anxious to extort from me."

"Your imperial pleasure then," said the Patriarch, "is fixed that your unfortunate son-in-law shall suffer death for his accession to this conspiracy, deluded by that heathen villain Agelastes and the traitorous Achilles Tatius?"

"Such is my purpose," said the Emperor; "and in evidence that I mean not again to pass over a sentence of this kind with a seeming execution only, as in the case of Ursel, this ungrateful traitor of ours shall be led from the top of the staircase, or ladder of Acheron, as it is called, through the large chamber named the Hall of Judgment, at the upper end of which are arranged the apparatus for execution, by which I swear——"

"Swear not at all!" said the Patriarch; "I forbid thee, in the name of that Heaven whose voice (though unworthy) speaks in my person, to quench the smoking flax, or destroy the slight hope which there may remain, that you may finally be persuaded to alter your purpose respecting your misguided son-in-law, within the space allotted to him to sue for your mercy. Remember, I pray you, the remorse of Constantine."

"What means your reverence?" said Irene.

"A trifle," replied the Emperor, "not worthy being quoted from such a mouth as the Patriarch's, being, as it probably is, a relic of paganism."

"What is it?" exclaimed the females anxiously, in the hope of hearing something which might strengthen their side of the argument, and something moved, perhaps, by curiosity, a motive which seldom slumbers in a female bosom, even when the stronger passions are in arms.

"The Patriarch will tell you," answered Alexius, "since you must needs know; though, I promise you, you will not receive any assistance in your argument from a silly legendary tale."

"Hear it, however," said the Patriarch; "for though it is a tale of the olden time, and sometimes supposed to refer to the period when heathenism predominated, it is no less true that it was a vow made and registered in the chancery of the rightful Deity, by an Emperor of Greece.

"What I am now to relate to you," continued he, "is, in truth, a tale not only of a Christian Emperor, but of him who made the whole empire Christian; and of that very Constantine, who was also the first who declared Constantinople to be the metropolis of the empire. This hero, remarkable alike for his zeal for religion and for his warlike achievements, was crowned by Heaven with repeated victory and with all manner of blessings, save that unity in his family which wise men are most ambitious to possess. Not only was the blessing of concord among brethren denied to the family of this triumphant Emperor, but

a deserving son of mature age, who had been supposed to aspire to share the throne with his father, was suddenly, and at midnight, called upon to enter his defence against a capital charge of treason. You will readily excuse my referring to the arts by which the son was rendered guilty in the eyes of the father. Be it enough to say that the unfortunate young man fell a victim to the guilt of his stepmother, Fausta, and that he disdained to exculpate himself from a charge so gross and so erroneous. It is said, that the anger of the Emperor was kept up against his son by the sycophants who called upon Constantine to observe that the culprit disdained even to supplicate for mercy, or vindicate his innocence from so foul a charge.

"But the death-blow had no sooner struck the innocent youth, than his father obtained proof of the rashness with which he had acted. He had at this period been engaged in constructing the subterranean parts of the Blacquernal palace, which his remorse appointed to contain a record of his paternal grief and contrition. At the upper part of the staircase, called the Pit of Acheron, he caused to be constructed a large chamber, still called the Hall of Judgment, for the purpose of execution. A passage through an archway in the upper wall leads from the hall to the place of misery, where the axe, or other engine, is disposed for the execution of state prisoners of consequence. Over this archway was placed a species of marble altar, surmounted by an image of the unfortunate Crispus—the materials were gold, and it bore the memorable inscription, TO MY SON, WHOM I RASHLY CONDEMNED, AND TOO HASTILY EXECUTED. When constructing this passage, Constantine made a vow that he himself and his posterity, being reigning Emperors, would stand beside the statue of Crispus at the time when any individual of their family should be led to execution, and before they suffered him to pass from the Hall of Judgment to the Chamber of Death, that they should themselves be personally convinced of the truth of the charge under which he suffered.

"Time rolled on—the memory of Constantine was remembered almost like that of a saint, and the respect paid to it threw into shadow the anecdote of his son's death. The exigencies of the state rendered it difficult to keep so large a sum in specie invested in a statue, which called to mind the unpleasant failings of so great a man. Your Imperial Highness's predecessors applied the metal which formed the statue to support the Turkish wars; and the remorse and penance of Constantine died away in an obscure tradition of the church or of the palace. Still, however, unless your Imperial Majesty has strong reasons to the contrary, I should give it as my opinion that you will hardly achieve what is due to the memory of the greatest of your predecessors, unless you give this unfortunate criminal, being so near a relation of your own, an opportunity of pleading his cause before passing by the altar of refuge; being the name which is commonly given to the monument of the unfortunate Crispus, son of Constantine, although

now deprived both of the golden letters which composed the inscription, and the golden image which represented the royal sufferer."

A mournful strain of music was now heard to ascend the stair so often mentioned.

"If I must hear the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius, ere he pass the altar of refuge, there must be no loss of time," said the Emperor; "for these melancholy sounds announce that he has already approached the Hall of Judgment."

Both the imperial ladies began instantly, with the utmost earnestness, to deprecate the execution of the Cæsar's doom, and to conjure Alexius, as he hoped for quiet in his household, and the everlasting gratitude of his wife and daughter, that he would listen to their entreaties in behalf of an unfortunate man, who had been seduced into guilt, but not from his heart.

"I will at least see him," said the Emperor, "and the holy vow of Constantine shall be in the present instance strictly observed. But remember, you foolish women, that the state of Crispus and the present Cæsar is as different as guilt from innocence, and that their fates, therefore, may be justly decided upon opposite principles, and with opposite results. But I will confront this criminal; and you, Patriarch, may be present to render what help is in your power to a dying man; for you, the wife and mother of the traitor, you will, methinks, do well to retire to the church, and pray God for the soul of the deceased, rather than disturb his last moments with unavailing lamentations."

"Alexius," said the Empress Irene, "I beseech you to be contented; be assured that we will not leave you in this dogged humour of blood-shedding, lest you make such materials for history as are fitter for the time of Nero than of Constantine."

The Emperor, without reply, led the way into the Hall of Judgment, where a much stronger light than usual was already shining up the stair of Acheron, from which were heard to sound, by sullen and intermitted fits, the penitential psalms which the Greek Church has appointed to be sung at executions. Twenty mute slaves, the pale colour of whose turbans gave a ghastly look to the withered cast of their features and the glaring whiteness of their eyeballs, ascended two by two, as it were from the bowels of the earth, each of them bearing in one hand a naked sabre and in the other a lighted torch. After these came the unfortunate Nicephorus; his looks were those of a man half-dead from the terror of immediate dissolution, and what he possessed of remaining attention, was turned successively to two black-stoled monks, who were anxiously repeating religious passages to him alternately from the Greek Scripture, and the form of devotion adopted by the court of Constantinople. The Cæsar's dress also corresponded to his mournful fortunes: his legs and arms were bare, and a simple white tunic, the neck of which was already open, showed that he had assumed the garments which were to serve his last turn.

A tall, muscular Nubian slave, who considered himself obviously as the principal person in the procession, bore on his shoulder a large, heavy headsman's axe, and, like a demon waiting on a sorcerer, stalked step for step after his victim. The rear of the procession was closed by a band of four priests, each of whom chanted from time to time the devotional psalm which was thundered forth on the occasion; and another of slaves, armed with bows and quivers, and with lances, to resist any attempt at rescue, if such should be offered.

It would have required a harder heart than that of the unlucky Princess to have resisted this gloomy apparatus of fear and sorrow, surrounding, at the same time directed against, a beloved object, the lover of her youth and the husband of her bosom, within a few minutes of the termination of his mortal career.

As the mournful train approached towards the altar of refuge, half-encircled as it now was by the two great and expanded arms which projected from the wall, the Emperor, who stood directly in the passage, threw upon the flame of the altar some chips of aromatic wood, steeped in spirit of wine, which, leaping at once into a blaze, illuminated the doleful procession, the figure of the principal culprit, and the slaves, who had most of them extinguished their flambeaux so soon as they had served the purpose of lighting them up the staircase.

The sudden light spread from the altar failed not to make the Emperor and the Princesses visible to the mournful group which approached through the hall. All halted—all were silent. It was a meeting, as the Princess has expressed herself in her historical work, such as took place betwixt Ulysses and the inhabitants of the other world, who, when they tasted of the blood of his sacrifices, recognised him indeed, but with empty lamentations and gestures feeble and shadowy. The hymn of contrition sank also into silence; and, of the whole group, the only figure rendered more distinct was the gigantic executioner, whose high and furrowed forehead, as well as the broad steel of his axe, caught and reflected back the bright gleam from the altar. Alexius saw the necessity of breaking the silence which ensued, lest it should give the intercessors for the prisoner an opportunity of renewing their entreaties.

"Nicephorus Briennius," he said, with a voice which, although generally interrupted by a slight hesitation, which procured him, among his enemies, the nickname of the Stutterer, yet, upon important occasions like the present, was so judiciously tuned and balanced in its sentences, that no such defect was at all visible—"Nicephorus Briennius," he said, "late Cæsar, the lawful doom hath been spoken, that, having conspired against the life of thy rightful sovereign and affectionate father, Alexius Comnenus, thou shalt suffer the appropriate sentence, by having thy head struck from thy body. Here, therefore, at the last altar of refuge, I meet thee, according to the vow of the immortal Constantine, for the purpose of demanding whether thou hast

"'I have been tempted,' he said, dropping on his knees, 'and I have fallen'" (p. 357).

anything to allege why this doom should not be executed? Even at this eleventh hour thy tongue is unloosed to speak with freedom what may concern thy life. All is prepared in this world and in the next. Look forward beyond yon archway—the block is fixed. Look behind thee, thou see'st the axe already sharpened—thy place for good or evil in the next world is already determined—time flies—eternity approaches. If thou hast aught to say, speak it freely—if nought, confess the justice of thy sentence and pass on to death."

The Emperor commenced this oration, with those looks described by his daughter as so piercing, that they dazzled like lightning, and his periods, if not precisely flowing like burning lava, were yet the accents of a man having the power of absolute command, and as such produced an effect not only on the criminal, but also upon the Prince himself, whose watery eyes and faltering voice acknowledged his sense and feeling of the fatal import of the present moment.

Rousing himself to the conclusion of what he had commenced, the Emperor again demanded whether the prisoner had anything to say in his own defence.

Nicephorus was not one of those hardened criminals who may be termed the very prodigies of history, from the coolness with which they contemplated the consummation of their crimes, whether in their own punishment or the misfortunes of others. "I have been tempted," he said, dropping on his knees, "and I have fallen. I have nothing to allege in excuse of my folly and ingratitude; but I stand prepared to die to expiate my guilt." A deep sigh, almost amounting to a scream, was here heard, close behind the Emperor, and its cause assigned by the sudden exclamation of Irene,—"My lord! my lord! your daughter is gone!" And in fact Anna Comnena had sunk into her mother's arms without either sense or motion. The father's attention was instantly called to support his swooning child, while the unhappy husband strove with the guards to be permitted to go to the assistance of his wife. "Give me but five minutes of that time which the law has abridged—let my efforts but assist in recalling her to a life which should be as long as her virtues and her talents deserve; and then let me die at her feet, for I care not to go an inch beyond."

The Emperor, who in fact had been more astonished at the boldness and rashness of Nicephorus than alarmed by his power, considered him as a man rather misled than misleading others, and felt, therefore, the full effect of this last interview. He was, besides, not naturally cruel, where severities were to be enforced under his own eye.

"The divine and immortal Constantine," he said, "did not, I am persuaded, subject his descendants to this severe trial in order further to search out the innocence of the criminals, but rather to give to those who came after him an opportunity of generously forgiving a crime which could not, without pardon, the express pardon of the Prince, escape without punishment. I rejoice that I am born of the willow

rather than of the oak, and I acknowledge my weakness, that not even the safety of my own life, or resentment of this unhappy man's treasonable machinations, have the same effect with me as the tears of my wife and the swooning of my daughter. Rise up, Nicephorus Briennius, freely pardoned, and restored even to the rank of Cæsar. We will direct thy pardon to be made out by the great Logothete, and sealed with the golden bull. For four-and-twenty hours thou art a prisoner, until an arrangement is made for preserving the public peace. Meanwhile, thou wilt remain under the charge of the Patriarch, who will be answerable for thy forthcoming.—Daughter and wife, you must now go hence to your own apartment; a future time will come, during which you may have enough of weeping and embracing, mourning and rejoicing. Pray Heaven that I, who, having been trained on till I have sacrificed justice and true policy to uxorious compassion and paternal tenderness of heart, may not have cause at last for grieving in good earnest for all the events of this miscellaneous drama."

The pardoned Cæsar, who endeavoured to regulate his ideas according to this unexpected change, found it as difficult to reconcile himself to the reality of his situation as Ursel to the face of nature, after having been long deprived of enjoying it; so much do the dizziness and confusion of ideas, occasioned by moral and physical causes of surprise and terror, resemble each other in their effects on the understanding.

At length he stammered forth a request that he might be permitted to go to the field with the Emperor, and divert, by the interposition of his own body, the traitorous blows which some desperate man might aim against that of his Prince, in a day which was too likely to be one of danger and bloodshed.

"Hold there!" said Alexius Comnenus; "we will not begin thy newly-redeemed life by renewed doubts of thine allegiance; yet it is but fitting to remind thee, that thou art still the nominal and ostensible head of those who expect to take a part in this day's insurrection, and it will be the safest course to trust its pacification to others than to thee. Go, sir, compare notes with the Patriarch, and merit your pardon by confessing to him any traitorous intentions concerning this foul conspiracy with which we may be as yet unacquainted.—Daughter and wife, farewell! I must now depart for the lists, where I have to speak with the traitor Achilles Tatius and the heathenish infidel Agelastes, if he still lives, but of whose providential death I hear a confirmed rumour."

"Yet do not go, my dearest father!" said the Princess; "but let me rather go to encourage the loyal subjects in your behalf. The extreme kindness which you have extended towards my guilty husband, convinces me of the extent of your affection towards your unworthy daughter, and the greatness of the sacrifice which you have made to

her almost childish affection for an ungrateful man, who put your life in danger."

"That is to say, daughter," said the Emperor, smiling, "that the pardon of your husband is a boon which has lost its merit when it is granted? Take my advice, Anna, and think otherwise; wives and their husbands ought in prudence to forget their offences towards each other as soon as human nature will permit them. Life is too short, and conjugal tranquillity too uncertain, to admit of dwelling long upon such irritating subjects. To your apartments, Princesses, and prepare the scarlet-buskins and the embroidery which is displayed on the cuffs and collars of the Cæsar's robe, indicative of his high rank. He must not be seen without them on the morrow.—Reverend father, I remind you once more that the Cæsar is in your personal custody from this moment until to-morrow at the same hour."

They parted; the Emperor repairing to put himself at the head of his Varangian guards—the Cæsar, under the superintendence of the Patriarch, withdrawing into the interior of the Blacquernal palace, where Nicephorus Briennius was under the necessity of "unthreading the rude eye of rebellion," and throwing such lights as were in his power upon the progress of the conspiracy.

"Agelastes," he said, "Achilles Tatius, and Hereward the Varangian, were the persons principally entrusted in its progress. But whether they had been all true to their engagements, he did not pretend to be assured."

In the female apartments, there was a violent discussion betwixt Anna Comnena and her mother. The Princess had undergone during the day many changes of sentiment and feeling; and though they had finally united themselves into one strong interest in her husband's favour, yet no sooner was the fear of his punishment removed, than the sense of his ungrateful behaviour began to revive. She became sensible also that a woman of her extraordinary attainments, who had been by a universal course of flattery disposed to entertain a very high opinion of her own consequence, made rather a poor figure when she had been the passive subject of a long series of intrigues, by which she was destined to be disposed of in one way or the other, according to the humour of a set of subordinate conspirators, who never so much as dreamed of regarding her as a being capable of forming a wish in her own behalf, or even yielding or refusing a consent. Her father's authority over her, and right to dispose of her, was less questionable; but even then it was something derogatory to the dignity of a Princess born in the purple—an authoress besides, and giver of immortality—to be, without her own consent, thrown, as it were, at the head now of one suitor, now of another, however mean or disgusting, whose alliance could for the time benefit the Emperor. The consequence of these moody reflections was, that Anna Comnena deeply toiled in spirit for the discovery of some means by which she might assert her sullied dignity, and various were the expedients which she revolved.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"But now the hand of fate is on the curtain,
And brings the scene to light."

Don Sebastian.

THE gigantic trumpet of the Varangians sounded its loudest note of march, and the squadrons of the faithful guards, sheathed in complete mail, and enclosing in their centre the person of their imperial master, set forth upon their procession through the streets of Constantinople. The form of Alexius, glittering in his splendid armour, seemed no unmeet central point for the force of an empire; and while the citizens crowded in the train of him and his escort, there might be seen a visible difference between those who came with the premeditated intention of tumult, and the greater part, who, like the multitude of every great city, thrust each other, and shout for rapture on account of any cause for which a crowd may be collected together. The hope of the conspirators was lodged chiefly in the Immortal Guards, who were levied principally for the defence of Constantinople, partook of the general prejudices of the citizens, and had been particularly influenced by those in favour of Ursel, by whom, previous to his imprisonment, they had themselves been commanded. The conspirators had determined that those of this body who were considered as most discontented, should early in the morning take possession of the posts in the lists most favourable for their purpose of assaulting the Emperor's person. But, in spite of all efforts short of actual violence, for which the time did not seem to be come, they found themselves disappointed in this

purpose, by parties of the Varangian guards, planted with apparent carelessness, but, in fact, with perfect skill, for the prevention of their enterprise. Somewhat confounded at perceiving that a design, which they could not suppose to be suspected, was, nevertheless, on every part controlled and counter-checked, the conspirators began to look for the principal persons of their own party, on whom they depended for orders in this emergency; but neither the Cæsar nor Agelastes was to be seen, whether in the lists or on the military march from Constantinople; and though Achilles Tatius rode in the latter assembly, yet it might be clearly observed that he was rather attending upon the Protospathaire than assuming that independence as an officer which he loved to affect.

In this manner, as the Emperor with his glittering bands approached the phalanx of Tancred and his followers, who were drawn up, it will be remembered, upon a rising cape between the city and the lists, the main body of the imperial procession deflected in some degree from the straight road, in order to march past them without interruption; while the Protospathaire and the Acolyte passed under the escort of a band of Varangians, to bear the Emperor's inquiries to Prince Tancred, concerning the purpose of his being there with his band. The short march was soon performed—the large trumpet which attended the two officers sounded a parley, and Tancred himself, remarkable for that personal beauty which Tasso has preferred to any of the crusaders, except Rinaldo d'Este, the creature of his own poetical imagination, advanced to parley with them.

"The Emperor of Greece," said the Protospathaire to Tancred, "requires the Prince of Otranto to show, by the two high officers who shall deliver him this message, with what purpose he has returned, contrary to his oath, to the right side of these straits; assuring Prince Tancred, at the same time, that nothing will so much please the Emperor, as to receive an answer not at variance with his treaty with the Duke of Bouillon, and the oath which was taken by the crusading nobles and their soldiers; since that would enable the Emperor, in conformity to his own wishes, by his kind reception of Prince Tancred and his troop, to show how high is his estimation of the dignity of the one, and the bravery of both. We wait an answer."

The tone of the message had nothing in it very alarming, and its substance cost Prince Tancred very little trouble to answer. "The cause," he said, "of the Prince of Otranto appearing here with fifty lances, is this cartel, in which a combat is appointed betwixt Nicephorus Briennius, called the Cæsar, a high member of this empire, and a worthy knight of great fame, the partner of the Pilgrims who have taken the Cross, in their high vow to rescue Palestine from the infidels. The name of the said Knight is the redoubted Robert of Paris. It becomes, therefore, an obligation, indispensable upon the Holy Pilgrims of the Crusade, to send one chief of their number,

with a body of men-at-arms, sufficient to see, as is usual, fair play between the combatants. That such is their intention may be seen from their sending no more than fifty lances, with their furniture and following; whereas it would have cost them no trouble to have detached ten times the number, had they nourished any purpose of interfering by force, or disturbing the fair combat which is about to take place. The Prince of Otranto, therefore, and his followers, will place themselves at the disposal of the Imperial Court, and witness the proceedings of the combat, with the most perfect confidence that the rules of fair battle will be punctually observed."

The two Grecian officers transmitted this reply to the Emperor, who heard it with pleasure, and, immediately proceeding to act upon the principle which he had laid down, of maintaining peace, if possible, with the crusaders, named Prince Tancred with the Protrospathaire as Field Marshals of the lists, fully empowered, under the Emperor, to decide all the terms of the combat, and to have recourse to Alexius himself where their opinions disagreed. This was made known to the assistants, who were thus prepared for the entry into the lists of the Grecian officer and the Italian prince in full armour, while a proclamation announced to all the spectators their solemn office. The same annunciation commanded the assistants of every kind to clear a convenient part of the seats which surrounded the lists on one side, that it might serve for the accommodation of Prince Tancred's followers.

Achilles Tatius, who was a heedful observer of all these passages, saw with alarm, that by the last collocation the armed Latins were interposed between the Immortal Guards and the discontented citizens, which made it most probable that the conspiracy was discovered, and that Alexius found he had a good right to reckon upon the assistance of Tancred and his forces in the task of suppressing it. This, added to the cold and caustic manner in which the Emperor communicated his commands to him, made the Acolyte of opinion that his best chance of escape from the danger in which he was now placed, was, that the whole conspiracy should fall to the ground, and that the day should pass without the least attempt to shake the throne of Alexius Comnenus. Even then it continued highly doubtful whether a despot, so wily and so suspicious as the Emperor, would think it sufficient to rest satisfied with the private knowledge of the undertaking and its failure, with which he appeared to be possessed, without putting into exercise the bow-strings and the blinding-irons of the mutes of the interior. There was, however, little possibility either of flight or of resistance. The least attempt to withdraw himself from the neighbourhood of those faithful followers of the Emperor, personal foes of his own, by whom he was gradually and more closely surrounded, became each moment more perilous, and more certain to provoke a rupture which it was the interest of the weaker party to delay,

with whatever difficulty. And while the soldiers under Achilles's immediate authority seemed still to treat him as their superior officer, and appeal to him for the word of command, it became more and more evident that the slightest degree of suspicion which should be excited, would be the instant signal for his being placed under arrest. With a trembling heart, therefore, and eyes dimmed by the powerful idea of soon parting with the light of day, and all that it made visible, the Acolyte saw himself condemned to watch the

Ursel addressing the crowd (p. 365).

turn of circumstances, over which he could have no influence, and to content himself with waiting the result of a drama, in which his own life was concerned, although the piece was played by others. Indeed, it seemed as if through the whole assembly some signal was waited for, which no one was in readiness to give.

The discontented citizens and soldiers looked in vain for Agelastes and the Cæsar; and when they observed the condition of Achilles Tatius, it seemed such as rather to express doubt and consternation, than to give encouragement to the hopes they had entertained. Many of the lower classes, however, felt too secure in their own insignificance

to fear the personal consequences of a tumult, and were desirous, therefore, to provoke the disturbance, which seemed hushing itself to sleep.

A hoarse murmur, which attained almost the importance of a shout, exclaimed,—"Justice, justice!—Ursel, Ursel!—The rights of the Immortal Guards!" etc. At this the trumpet of the Varangians awoke, and its tremendous tones were heard to peal loudly over the whole assembly, as the voice of its presiding deity. A dead silence prevailed in the multitude, and the voice of a herald announced, in the name of Alexius Comnenus, his sovereign will and pleasure.

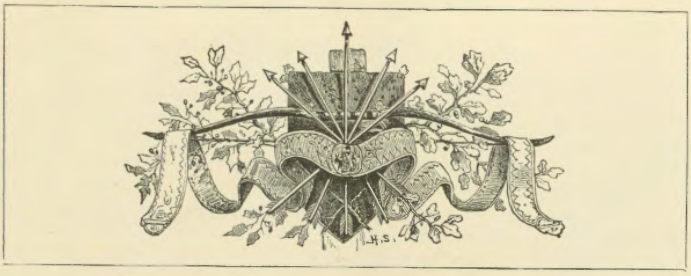
"Citizens of the Roman Empire, your complaints, stirred up by factious men, have reached the ear of your Emperor; you shall yourselves be witness to his power of gratifying his people. At your request, and before your own sight, the visual ray which hath been quenched shall be re-illumined—the mind whose efforts were restricted to the imperfect supply of individual wants shall be again extended, if such is the owner's will, to the charge of an ample Theme or division of the empire. Political jealousy, more hard to receive conviction than the blind to receive sight, shall yield itself conquered, by the Emperor's paternal love of his people and his desire to give them satisfaction. Ursel, the darling of your wishes, supposed to be long dead, or at least believed to exist in blinded seclusion, is restored to you well in health, clear in eyesight, and possessed of every faculty necessary to adorn the Emperor's favour, or merit the affection of the people."

As the herald thus spoke, a figure, which had hitherto stood shrouded behind some officers of the interior, now stepped forth, and flinging from him a dusky veil, in which he was wrapped, appeared in a dazzling scarlet garment, of which the sleeves and buskins displayed those ornaments which expressed a rank nearly adjacent to that of the Emperor himself. He held in his hand a silver truncheon, the badge of delegated command over the Immortal Guards, and, kneeling before the Emperor, presented it to his hands, intimating a virtual resignation of the command which it implied. The whole assembly were electrified at the appearance of a person long supposed either dead, or by cruel means rendered incapable of public trust. Some recognised the man whose appearance and features were not easily forgot, and gratulated him upon his most unexpected return to the service of his country. Others stood suspended in amazement, not knowing whether to trust their eyes, while a few determined malecontents eagerly pressed upon the assembly an allegation that the person presented as Ursel was only a counterfeit, and the whole a trick of the Emperor.

"Speak to them, noble Ursel," said the Emperor. "Tell them, that if I have sinned against thee, it has been because I was deceived, and that my disposition to make thee amends is as ample as ever was my purpose of doing thee wrong."

"Friends and countrymen," said Ursel, turning himself to the assembly, "his Imperial Majesty permits me to offer my assurance, that if in any former part of my life I have suffered at his hand, it is more than wiped out by the feelings of a moment so glorious as this; and that I am well satisfied, from the present instant, to spend what remains of my life in the service of the most generous and beneficent of sovereigns, or, with his permission, to bestow it in preparing, by devotional exercises, for an infinite immortality to be spent in the society of saints and angels. Whichever choice I shall make, I reckon that you, my beloved countrymen, who have remembered me so kindly during years of darkness and captivity, will not fail to afford me the advantage of your prayers."

This sudden apparition of the long-lost Ursel had too much of that which elevates and surprises not to captivate the multitude, and they sealed their reconciliation with three tremendous shouts, which are said so to have shaken the air, that birds, incapable of sustaining themselves, sank down exhausted out of their native element.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

"What, leave the combat out!" exclaimed the knight.
"Yea! or we must renounce the Stagyrite."
"So large a crowd the stage will ne'er contain."
"Then build a new, or act it on a plain."

POPE.

THE sounds of the gratulating shout had expanded over the distant shores of the Bosphorus by mountain and forest, and died at length in the farthest echoes, when the people, in the silence which ensued, appeared to ask each other what next scene was about to adorn a pause so solemn and a stage so august. The pause would probably have soon given place to some new clamour, for a multitude, from whatever cause assembled, seldom remains long silent, had not a new signal from the Varangian trumpet given notice of a fresh purpose to solicit their attention. The blast had something in its tone spirit-stirring and yet melancholy, partaking both of the character of a point of war, and of the doleful sounds which might be chosen to announce an execution of peculiar solemnity. Its notes were high and widely extended, and prolonged and long dwelt upon, as if the brazen clamour had been waked by something more tremendous than the lungs of mere mortals.

The multitude appeared to acknowledge these awful sounds, which were indeed such as habitually solicited their attention to imperial edicts of melancholy import, by which rebellions were announced, dooms of treason discharged, and other tidings of a great and affecting import intimated to the people of Constantinople. When the trumpet had in its turn ceased, with its thrilling and doleful notes, to agitate the immense assembly, the voice of the herald again addressed them.

It announced in a grave and affecting strain, that it sometimes chanced how the people failed in their duty to a sovereign, who was unto them as a father, and how it became the painful duty of the

prince to use the rod of correction rather than the olive sceptre of mercy.

"Fortunate," continued the herald, "it is, when the supreme Deity, having taken on Himself the preservation of a throne, in beneficence and justice resembling His own, has also assumed the most painful task of His earthly delegate, by punishing those whom His unerring judgment acknowledges as most guilty, and leaving to His substitute the more agreeable task of pardoning such of those as art has misled, and treachery hath involved in its snares.

"Such being the case, Greece and its accompanying Themes, are called upon to listen and learn that a villain, named Agelastes, who had insinuated himself into the favour of the Emperor, by affectation of deep knowledge and severe virtue, had formed a treacherous plan for the murder of the Emperor Alexius Comnenus, and a revolution in the state. This person, who, under pretended wisdom, hid the doctrines of a heretic and the vices of a sensualist, had found proselytes to his doctrines even among the Emperor's household, and those persons who were most bound to him, and down to the lower order, to excite the last of whom were dispersed a multitude of forged rumours, similiar to those concerning Ursel's death and blindness, of which your own eyes have witnessed the falsehood."

The people, who had hitherto listened in silence, upon this appeal broke forth in a clamorous assent. They had scarcely been again silent, ere the iron-voiced herald continued his proclamation.

"Not Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," he said, "had more justly, or more directly, fallen under the doom of an offended Deity, than this villain, Agelastes. The steadfast earth gaped to devour the apostate sons of Israel, but the termination of this wretched man's existence has been, as far as can now be known, by the direct means of an evil spirit, whom his own arts had evoked into the upper air. By the spirit, as would appear by the testimony of a noble lady, and other females, who witnessed the termination of his life, Agelastes was strangled, a fate well becoming his odious crimes. Such a death, even of a guilty man, must, indeed, be most painful to the humane feelings of the Emperor, because it involves suffering beyond this world. But the awful catastrophe carries with it this comfort, that it absolves the Emperor from the necessity of carrying any farther a vengeance which Heaven itself seems to have limited to the exemplary punishment of the principal conspirator. Some changes of officers and situations shall be made, for the sake of safety and good order; but the secret, who had or who had not, been concerned in this awful crime, shall sleep in the bosoms of the persons themselves implicated, since the Emperor is determined to dismiss their offence from his memory, as the effect of a transient delusion. Let all, therefore, who now hear me, whatever consciousness they may possess of a knowledge of what was this day intended, return to their houses, assured that their own thoughts will be their only

punishment. Let them rejoice that Almighty goodness has saved them from the meditations of their own hearts, and, according to the affecting language of Scripture,—'Let them repent and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall them.'"

The voice of the herald then ceased, and was again answered by the shouts of the audience. These were unanimous; for circumstances contributed to convince the malecontent party that they stood at the Sovereign's mercy, and the edict that they heard having shown his aquaintance with their guilt, it lay at his pleasure to let loose upon them the strength of the Varangians, while, from the terms on which it had pleased him to receive Tancred, it was probable that the Apuleian forces were also at his disposal.

The voices, therefore, of the bulky Stephanos, of Harpax the centurion, and other rebels, both of the camp and city, were the first to thunder forth their gratitude for the clemency of the Emperor, and their thanks to Heaven for his preservation.

The audience, reconciled to the thoughts of the discovered and frustrated conspiracy, began meantime, according to their custom, to turn themselves to the consideration of the matter which had more avowedly called them together, and private whispers, swelling by degrees into murmurs, began to express the dissatisfaction of the citizens at being thus long assembled, without receiving any communication respecting the announced purpose of their meeting.

Alexius was not slow to perceive the tendency of their thoughts; and, on a signal from his hand, the trumpets blew a point of war, in sounds far more lively than those which had prefaced the imperial edict. "Robert, Count of Paris," then said a herald, "art thou here in thy place, or by knightly proxy, to answer the challenge brought against thee by his Imperial Highness Nicephorus Briennius, Cæsar of this empire?"

The Emperor conceived himself to have equally provided against the actual appearance at this call of either of the parties named, and had prepared an exhibition of another kind, namely, certain cages, tenanted by wild animals, which being now loosened, should do their pleasure with each other in the eyes of the assembly. His astonishment and confusion, therefore, were great, when, as the last note of the proclamation died in the echo, Count Robert of Paris stood forth, armed cap-à-pie, his mailed charger led behind him from within the curtained enclosure, at one end of the lists, as if ready to mount at the signal of the marshal.

The alarm and the shame that were visible in every countenance near the imperial presence, when no Cæsar came forth in like fashion to confront the formidable Frank, were not of long duration. Hardly had the style and title of the Count of Paris been duly announced by the heralds, and their second summons of his antagonist uttered in due form, when a person, dressed like one of the Varangian guards,

sprang into the lists, and announced himself as ready to do battle in the name and place of the Cæsar Nicephorus Briennius, and for the honour of the empire.

Alexius with the utmost joy beheld this unexpected assistance, and readily gave his consent to the bold soldier, who stood thus forward in the hour of utmost need, to take upon himself the dangerous office

"The first blows were given and parried with great caution" (p. 370).

of champion. He the more readily acquiesced, as, from the size and appearance of the soldier, and the gallant bearing he displayed, he had no doubt of his individual person, and fully confided in his valour. But Prince Tancred interposed his opposition.

"The lists," he said, "were only open to knights and nobles; or, at any rate, men were not permitted to meet therein who were not of some equality of birth and blood; nor could he remain a silent witness where the laws of chivalry were in such respects forgotten."

"Let Count Robert of Paris," said the Varangian, "look upon my countenance, and say whether he has not, by promise, removed all objection to our contest which might be founded upon an inequality of condition, and let him be judge himself, whether, by meeting me in this field, he will do more than comply with a compact which he has long since become bound by."

Count Robert, upon this appeal, advanced and acknowledged, without further debate, that, notwithstanding their difference of rank, he held himself bound by his solemn word to give this valiant soldier a meeting in the field. That he regretted, on account of this gallant man's eminent virtues, and the high services he had received at his hands, that they should now stand upon terms of such bloody arbitration; but since nothing was more common than that the fate of war called on friends to meet each other in mortal combat, he would not shrink from the engagement he had pledged himself to; nor did he think his quality in the slightest degree infringed or diminished, by meeting in battle a warrior so well known and of such good account as Hereward, the brave Varangian. He added, that "he willingly admitted that the combat should take place on foot, and with the battle-axe, which was the ordinary weapon of the Varangian guard."

Hereward had stood still, almost like a statue, while this discourse passed; but when the Count of Paris had made this speech, he inclined himself towards him with a graceful obeisance, and expressed himself honoured and gratified by the manly manner in which the Count acquitted himself, according to his promise, with complete honour and fidelity.

"What we are to do," said Count Robert with a sigh of regret, which even his love of battle could not prevent, "let us do quickly; the heart may be affected, but the hand must do its duty."

Hereward assented, with the additional remark, "Let us then lose no more time, which is already flying fast." And, grasping his axe, he stood prepared for combat.

"I also am ready," said Count Robert of Paris, taking the same weapon from a Varangian soldier, who stood by the lists. Both were immediately upon the alert, nor did further forms or circumstances put off the intended duel.

The first blows were given and parried with great caution, and Prince Tancred and others thought that on the part of Count Robert the caution was much greater than usual; but, in combat as in food, the appetite increases with the exercise. The fiercer passions began, as usual, to awaken with the clash of arms and the sense of deadly blows, some of which were made with great fury on either side, and parried with considerable difficulty, and not so completely but what blood flowed on both their parts. The Greeks looked with astonishment on a single combat, such as they had seldom witnessed, and held their breath as they beheld the furious blows dealt by either warrior,

and expected with each stroke the annihilation of one or other of the combatants. As yet their strength and agility seemed somewhat equally matched, although those who judged with more pretension to knowledge, were of opinion that Count Robert spared putting forth some part of the military skill for which he was celebrated; and the remark was generally made and allowed, that he had surrendered a great advantage by not insisting upon his right to fight upon horseback. On the other hand, it was the general opinion that the gallant Varangian omitted to take advantage of one or two opportunities afforded him by the heat of Count Robert's temper, who obviously was incensed at the duration of the combat.

Accident at length seemed about to decide what had been hitherto an equal contest. Count Robert, making a feint on one side of his antagonist, struck him on the other, which was uncovered, with the edge of his weapon, so that the Varangian reeled, and seemed in the act of falling to the earth. The usual sound made by spectators at the sight of any painful or unpleasant circumstance, by drawing the breath between the teeth, was suddenly heard to pass through the assembly, while a female voice loud and eagerly exclaimed,—"Count Robert of Paris! forget not this day that thou owest a life to Heaven and me." The Count was in the act of again seconding his blow, with what effect could hardly be judged, when this cry reached his ears, and apparently took away his disposition for further combat.

"I acknowledge the debt," he said, sinking his battle-axe, and retreating two steps from his antagonist, who stood in astonishment, scarcely recovered from the stunning effect of the blow by which he was so nearly prostrated. He sank the blade of his battle-axe in imitation of his antagonist, and seemed to wait in suspense what was to be the next process of the combat. "I acknowledge my debt," said the valiant Count of Paris, "alike to Bertha of Britain and to the Almighty, who has preserved me from the crime of ungrateful blood-guiltiness.—You have seen the fight, gentlemen," turning to Tancred and his chivalry, "and can testify, on your honour, that it has been maintained fairly on both sides, and without advantage on either. I presume my honourable antagonist has by this time satisfied the desire which brought me under his challenge, and which certainly had no taste in it of personal or private quarrel. On my part, I retain towards him such a sense of personal obligation as would render my continuing this combat, unless compelled to it by self-defence, a shameful and sinful action."

Alexius gladly embraced the terms of truce, which he was far from expecting, and threw down his warder, in signal that the duel was ended. Tancred, though somewhat surprised, and perhaps even scandalised, that a private soldier of the Emperor's guard should have so long resisted the utmost efforts of so approved a knight, could not but own that the combat had been fought with perfect fairness and equality, and decided upon terms dishonourable to neither party. The

Count's character being well known and established amongst the crusaders, they were compelled to believe that some motive of a most potent nature formed the principle upon which, very contrary to his general practice, he had proposed a cessation of the combat before it was brought to a deadly, or at least to a decisive conclusion. The edict of the Emperor upon the occasion, therefore, passed into a law, acknowledged by the assent of the chiefs present, and especially affirmed and gratulated by the shouts of the assembled spectators.

But perhaps the most interesting figure in the assembly was that of the bold Varangian, arrived so suddenly at a promotion of military renown, which the extreme difficulty he had experienced in keeping his ground against Count Robert had prevented him from anticipating, although his modesty had not diminished the indomitable courage with which he maintained the contest. He stood in the middle of the lists, his face ruddy with the exertion of the combat, and not less so from the modest consciousness proper to the plainness and simplicity of his character, which was disconcerted by finding himself the central point of the gaze of the multitude.

"Speak to me, my soldier," said Alexius, strongly affected by the gratitude which he felt was due to Hereward upon so singular an occasion, "speak to thine Emperor as his superior, for such thou art at this moment, and tell him if there is any manner, even at the expense of half his kingdom, to atone for his own life saved, and, what is yet dearer, for the honour of his country, which thou hast so manfully defended and preserved?"

"My lord," answered Hereward, "your Imperial Highness values my poor services over highly, and ought to attribute them to the noble Count of Paris, first, for his condescending to accept of an antagonist so mean in quality as myself; and next, in generously relinquishing victory when he might have achieved it by an additional blow; for I here confess before your Majesty, my brethren, and the assembled Grecians, that my power of protracting the combat was ended, when the gallant Count, by his generosity, put a stop to it."

"Do not thyself that wrong, brave man," said Count Robert; "for I vow to our Lady of the Broken Lances, that the combat was yet within the undetermined doom of Providence, when the pressure of my own feelings rendered me incapable of continuing it, to the necessary harm, perhaps to the mortal damage, of an antagonist to whom I owe so much kindness. Choose, therefore, the recompense which the generosity of thy Emperor offers in a manner so just and grateful, and fear not lest mortal voice pronounces that reward unmerited which Robert of Paris shall avouch with his sword to have been gallantly won upon his own crest."

"You are too great, my lord, and too noble," answered the Anglo-Saxon, "to be gainsaid by such as I am, and I must not awaken new strife between us by contesting the circumstances under which our

combat so suddenly closed, nor would it be wise or prudent in me further to contradict you. My noble Emperor generously offers me the right of naming what he calls my recompense; but let not his generosity be dispraised, although it is from you, my lord, and not from his Imperial Highness, that I am to ask a boon, to me the dearest to which my voice can give utterance."

"And that," said the Count, "has reference to Bertha, the faithful attendant of my wife?"

"Even so," said Hereward; "it is my proposal to request my discharge from the Varangian guard, and permission to share in your lordship's pious and honourable vow for the recovery of Palestine, with liberty to fight under your honoured banner, and permission from time to time to recommend my love-suit to Bertha, the attendant of the Countess of Paris, and the hope that it may find favour in the eyes of her noble lord and lady. I may thus finally hope to be restored to a country which I have never ceased to love over the rest of the world."

"Thy service, noble soldier," said the Count, "shall be as acceptable to me as that of a born earl; nor is there an opportunity of acquiring honour which I can shape for thee, to which, as it occurs, I will not gladly prefer thee. I will not boast of what interest I have with the King of England, but something I can do with him, and it shall be strained to the uttermost to settle thee in thine own beloved native country."

The Emperor then spoke. "Bear witness, heaven and earth, and you my faithful subjects, and you my gallant allies; above all, you my bold and true Varangian Guard, that we would rather have lost the brightest jewel from our imperial crown, than have relinquished the service of this true and faithful Anglo-Saxon. But since go he must and will, it shall be my study to distinguish him by such marks of beneficence as may make it known through his future life that he is the person to whom the Emperor Alexius Comnenus acknowledged a debt larger than his empire could discharge. You, my Lord Tancred, and your principal leaders, will sup with us this evening, and to-morrow resume your honourable and religious purpose of pilgrimage! We trust both the combatants will also oblige us by their presence.—Trumpets, give the signal for dismission."

The trumpets sounded accordingly, and the different classes of spectators, armed and unarmed, broke up into various parties, or formed into their military ranks, for the purpose of their return to the city.

The screams of women, suddenly and strangely raised, was the first thing that arrested the departure of the multitude, when those who glanced their eyes back, saw Sylvan, the great ourang-outang, produce himself in the lists, to their surprise and astonishment. The women, and many of the men who were present, unaccustomed to the ghastly look and savage appearance of a creature so extraordinary, raised a yell of terror so loud, that it discomposed the animal who was the occasion

of its being raised. Sylvan, in the course of the night, having escaped over the garden-wall of Agelastes, and clambered over the rampart of the city, found no difficulty in hiding himself in the lists which were in the act of being raised, having found a lurking-place in some dark corner under the seats of the spectators. From this he was probably dislodged by the tumult of the dispersing multitude, and had been compelled, therefore, to make an appearance in public when he least desired it, not unlike that of the celebrated Puliccinello, at the conclusion of his own drama, when he enters in mortal strife with the foul fiend himself, a scene which scarcely excites more terror among the juvenile audience than did the unexpected apparition of Sylvan among the spectators of the duel. Bows were bent and javelins pointed by the braver part of the soldiery, against an animal of an appearance so ambiguous, and whom his uncommon size and grizzly look caused most who beheld him to suppose either the devil himself, or the apparition of some fiendish deity of ancient days, whom the heathens worshipped. Sylvan had so far improved such opportunities as had been afforded him, as to become sufficiently aware that the attitudes assumed by so many military men, inferred immediate danger to his person, from which he hastened to shelter himself by flying to the protection of Hereward, with whom he had been in some degree familiarised. He seized him, accordingly, by the cloak, and, by the absurd and alarmed look of his fantastic features, and a certain wild and gibbering chatter, endeavoured to express his fear and to ask protection. Hereward understood the terrified creature, and turning to the Emperor's throne, said aloud,—"Poor frightened being, turn thy petition, and gestures, and tones, to a quarter which, having to-day pardoned so many offences which were wilfully and maliciously schemed, will not be, I am sure, obdurate to such as thou, in thy half-reasoning capacity, may have been capable of committing."

The creature, as is the nature of its tribe, caught from Hereward himself the mode of applying with most effect his gestures and pitiable supplication, while the Emperor, notwithstanding the serious scene which had just passed, could not help laughing at the touch of comedy flung into it by this last incident.

"My trusty Hereward,"—(He said aside, "I will not again call him Edward if I can help it")—"thou art the refuge of the distressed, whether it be man or beast, and nothing that sues through thy intercession, while thou remainest in our service, shall find its supplication in vain. Do thou, good Hereward," for the name was now pretty well established in his imperial memory, "and such of thy companions as know the habits of the creature, lead him back to his old quarters in the Blacquernal; and that done, my friend, observe that we request thy company, and that of thy faithful mate Bertha, to partake supper at our court, with our wife and daughter, and such of our servants and allies as we shall request to share the same honour. Be assured, that

while thou remainest with us, there is no point of dignity which shall not be willingly paid to thee.—And do thou approach, Achilles Tatius, as much favoured by thine Emperor as before this day dawned. What charges are against thee have been only whispered in a friendly ear, which remembers them not, unless (which Heaven forefend!) their remembrance is renewed by fresh offences."

"Once more the multitude of all ranks returned on their way to the city."

Achilles Tatius bowed till the plume of his helmet mingled with the mane of his fiery horse, but held it wisest to forbear any answer in words, leaving his crime and his pardon to stand upon those general terms in which the Emperor had expressed them.

Once more the multitude of all ranks returned on their way to the city, nor did any second interruption arrest their march. Sylvan, accompanied by one or two Varangians, who led him in a sort of

captivity, took his way to the vaults of the Blacquernal, which were in fact his proper habitation.

Upon the road to the city, Harpax, the notorious corporal of the Immortal Guards, held a discourse with one or two of his own soldiers, and of the citizens who had been members of the late conspiracy.

"So," said Stephanos, the prize-fighter, "a fine affair we have made of it, to suffer ourselves to be all anticipated and betrayed by a thick-skulled Varangian; every chance turning against us as they would against Corydon, the shoemaker, if he were to defy me to the circus. Ursel, whose death made so much work, turns out not to be dead after all; and what is worse, he lives not to our advantage. This fellow Hereward, who was yesterday no better than myself—what do I say?—better!—he was a great deal worse—an insignificant nobody in every respect!—is now crammed with honours, praises, and gifts, till he well-nigh returns what they have given him, and the Cæsar and the Acolyte, our associates, have lost the Emperor's love and confidence, and if they are suffered to survive, it must be like the tame domestic poultry, whom we pamper with food one day, that upon the next their necks may be twisted for spit or pot."

"Stephanos," replied the centurion, "thy form of body fits thee well for the Palæstra, but thy mind is not so acutely formed as to detect that which is real from that which is only probable, in the political world, of which thou art now judging. Considering the risk incurred by lending a man's ear to a conspiracy, thou oughtest to reckon it a saving in every particular, where he escapes with his life and character safe. This has been the case with Achilles Tatius, and with the Cæsar. They have remained also in their high places of trust and power, and may be confident that the Emperor will hardly dare to remove them at a future period, since the possession of the full knowledge of their guilt has not emboldened him to do so. Their power, thus left with them, is in fact ours; nor is there a circumstance to be supposed which can induce them to betray their confederates to the government. It is much more likely that they will remember them with the probability of renewing, at a fitter time, the alliance which binds them together. Cheer up thy noble resolution, therefore, my Prince of the Circus, and think that thou shalt still retain that predominant influence which the favourites of the amphitheatre are sure to possess over the citizens of Constantinople."

"I cannot tell," answered Stephanos; "but it gnaws at my heart like the worm that dieth not, to see this beggarly foreigner betray the noblest blood in the land, not to mention the best athlete in the Palæstra, and move off not only without punishment for his treachery, but with praise, honour, and preferment."

"True," said Harpax; "but, observe, my friend, that he does move off to purpose. He leaves the land, quits the corps in which he might claim preferment and a few vain honours, being valued at what such

trifles amount to. Hereward, in the course of one or two days, shall be little better than a disbanded soldier, subsisting by the poor bread which he can obtain as a follower of this beggarly Count, or which he is rather bound to dispute with the infidel, by encountering with his battle-axe the Turkish sabres. What will it avail him amidst the disasters, the slaughter, and the famine of Palestine, that he once upon a time was admitted to supper with the Emperor? We know Alexius Comnenus—he is willing to discharge, at the highest cost, such obligations as are incurred to men like this Hereward; and, believe me, I think that I see the wily despot shrug his shoulders in derision, when one morning he is saluted with the news of a battle in Palestine lost by the crusaders, in which his old acquaintance has fallen a dead man. I will not insult thee by telling thee how easy it might be to acquire the favour of a gentlewoman in waiting upon a lady of quality; nor do I think it would be difficult, should that be the object of the prize-fighter, to acquire the property of a large baboon like Sylvan, which no doubt would set up as a juggler any Frank who had meanness of spirit to propose to gain his bread in such a capacity, from the alms of the starving chivalry of Europe. But he who can stoop to envy the lot of such a person, ought not to be one whose chief personal distinctions are sufficient to place him first in rank over all the favourites of the amphitheatre."

There was something in this sophistical kind of reasoning which was but half satisfactory to the obtuse intellect of the prize-fighter, to whom it was addressed, although the only answer which he attempted was couched in this observation:—

"Ay, but, noble centurion, you forget that, besides empty honours, this Varangian Hereward, or Edward, whichever is his name, is promised a mighty donative of gold."

"Marry, you touch me there," said the centurion; "and when you tell me that the promise is fulfilled, I will willingly agree that the Anglo-Saxon hath gained something to be envied for; but while it remains in the shape of a naked promise, you shall pardon me, my worthy Stephanos, if I hold it of no more account than the mere pledges which are distributed among ourselves as well as to the Varangians, promising upon future occasions mints of money, which we are likely to receive at the same time with the last year's snow. Keep up your heart, therefore, noble Stephanos, and believe not that your affairs are worse for the miscarrage of this day; and let not thy gallant courage sink, but, remembering those principles upon which it was called into action, believe that thy objects are not the less secure because fate has removed their acquisition to a more distant day." The veteran and unbending conspirator, Harpax, thus strengthened for some future renewal of their enterprise the failing spirits of Stephanos.

After this, such leaders as were included in the invitation given by the Emperor, repaired to the evening meal, and, from the general

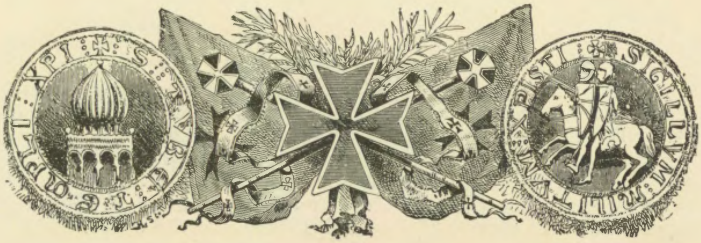
content and complaisance expressed by Alexius and his guests of every description, it could little have been supposed that the day had just passed over was one which had inferred a purpose so dangerous and treacherous.

The absence of the Countess Brenhilda, during this eventful day, created no small surprise to the Emperor and those in his immediate confidence, who knew her enterprising spirit, and the interest she must have felt in the issue of the combat. Bertha had made an early communication to the Count, that his lady, agitated with the many anxieties of the few preceding days, was unable to leave her apartment. The valiant knight, therefore, lost no time in acquainting his faithful Countess of his safety; and afterwards joining those who partook of the banquet at the palace, he bore himself as if the least recollection did not remain on his mind of the perfidious conduct of the Emperor at the conclusion of the last entertainment. He knew, in truth, that the knights of Prince Tancred not only maintained a strict watch round the house where Brenhilda remained, but also, that they preserved a severe ward in the neighbourhood of the Blacquernal, as well for the safety of their heroic leader, as for that of Count Robert, the respected companion of their military pilgrimage.

It was the general principle of the European chivalry, that distrust was rarely permitted to survive open quarrels, and that whatever was forgiven, was dismissed from their recollection, as unlikely to recur; but on the present occasion there was a more than usual assemblage of troops, which the occurrences of the day had drawn together, so that the crusaders were called upon to be particularly watchful.

It may be believed that the evening passed over without any attempt to renew the ceremonial in the council chamber of the Lions, which had been upon a former occasion terminated in such misunderstanding. Indeed, it would have been lucky if the explanation between the mighty Emperor of Greece and the chivalrous Knight of Paris had taken place earlier; for reflection on what had passed had convinced the Emperor that the Franks were not a people to be imposed upon by pieces of clockwork, and similiar trifles, and that what they did not understand was sure, instead of procuring their awe or admiration, to excite their anger and defiance. Nor had it altogether escaped Count Robert that the manners of the Eastern people were upon a different scale from those to which he had been accustomed; that they neither were so deeply affected by the spirit of chivalry, nor, in his own language, was the worship of the Lady of the Broken Lances so congenial a subject of adoration. This notwithstanding, Count Robert observed that Alexius Comnenus was a wise and politic prince; his wisdom perhaps too much allied to cunning, but yet aiding him to maintain with great address that empire over the minds of his subjects, which was necessary for their good and for maintaining his own authority. He therefore resolved to receive with equanimity whatever should be

offered by the Emperor, either in civility or in the way of jest, and not again to disturb an understanding which might be of advantage to Christendom, by a quarrel founded upon misconception of terms or misapprehension of manners. To this prudent resolution the Count of Paris adhered during the whole evening; with some difficulty, however, since it was somewhat inconsistent with his own fiery and inquisitive temper, which was equally desirous to know the precise amount of whatever was addressed to him, and to take umbrage at it, should it appear in the least degree offensive, whether so intended or not.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

IT was not until after the conquest of Jerusalem that Count Robert of Paris returned to Constantinople, and, with his wife, and such proportion of his followers as the sword and pestilence had left after that bloody warfare, resumed his course to his native kingdom. Upon reaching Italy, the first care of the noble Count and Countess was to celebrate in princely style the marriage of Hereward and his faithful Bertha, who had added to their other claims upon their master and mistress, those acquired by Hereward's faithful services in Palestine, and no less by Bertha's affectionate ministry to her lady in Constantinople.

As to the fate of Alexius Comnenus, it may be read at large in the history of his daughter Anna, who has represented him as the hero of many a victory, achieved, says the purple-born, in the third chapter and fifteenth book of her history, sometimes by his arms and sometimes by his prudence. "His boldness alone has gained some battles, at other times his success has been won by stratagem. He has erected the most illustrious of his trophies by confronting danger, by combating like a simple soldier, and throwing himself bareheaded into the thickest of the foe. But there are others," continues the accomplished lady, "which he gained an opportunity of erecting by assuming the appearance of terror, and even of retreat. In a word, he knew alike how to triumph either in flight or in pursuit, and remained upright even before those enemies who appeared to have struck him down; resembling the military implement termed the calthrop, which remains always upright in whatever direction it is thrown on the ground."

It would be unjust to deprive the Princess of the defence she herself makes against the obvious charge of partiality.

"I must still once more repel the reproach which some bring against me, as if my history was composed merely according to the dictates of the natural love for parents which is engraved in the hearts of children. In truth, it is not the effect of that affection which I bear

to mine, but it is the evidence of matter of fact, which obliges me to speak as I have done. Is it not possible that one can have at the same time an affection for the memory of a father and for truth? For myself, I have never directed my attempt to write history, otherwise than for the ascertainment of the matter of fact. With this purpose, I have taken for my subject the history of a worthy man. Is it just that, by the single accident of his being the author of my birth, his quality of my father ought to form a prejudice against me, which would ruin my

"Upon reaching Italy, the first care of the noble Count and Countess was to celebrate in princely style the marriage of Hereward and his faithful Bertha" (p. 380).

credit with my readers? I have given, upon other occasions, proofs sufficiently strong of the ardour which I had for the defence of my father's interests, which those that know me can never doubt; but, on the present, I have been limited by the inviolable fidelity with which I respect the truth, which I should have felt conscience to have veiled, under pretence of serving the renown of my father.—"Alexiad," Book XV., chap. iii.

This much we have deemed it our duty to quote, in justice to the fair historian; we will extract also her description of the Emperor's death, and are not unwilling to allow that the character assigned

to the Princess by our own Gibbon has in it a great deal of fairness and of truth.

Notwithstanding her repeated protests of sacrificing rather to the exact and absolute truth than to the memory of her deceased parent, Gibbon remarks truly, that "instead of the simplicity of style and narrative which wins a belief, an elaborate affectation of rhetoric and science betrays in every page the vanity of a female author. The genuine character of Alexius is lost in a vague constellation of virtues; and the perpetual strain of panegyric and apology awakens our jealousy to question the veracity of the historian, and the merit of the hero. We cannot, however, refuse her judicious and important remark, that the disorders of the times were the misfortune and the glory of Alexius; and that every calamity which can afflict a declining empire was accumulated on his reign by the justice of Heaven and the vices of his predecessors."— GIBBON'S "Roman Empire," Vol. IX., p. 83, foot-note.

The Princess accordingly feels the utmost assurance that a number of signs which appeared in heaven and on earth were interpreted by the soothsayers of the day as foreboding the death of the Emperor. By these means, Anna Comnena assigned to her father those indications of consequence, which ancient historians represent as necessary intimations of the sympathy of nature with the removal of great characters from the world; but she fails not to inform the Christian reader that her father's belief attached to none of these prognostics, and that even on the following remarkable occasion he maintained his incredulity:— A splendid statue, supposed generally to be a relic of paganism, holding in its hand a golden sceptre, and standing upon a base of porphyry, was overturned by a tempest, and was generally believed to be an intimation of the death of the Emperor. This, however, he generously repelled. Phidias, he said, and other great sculptors of antiquity, had the talent of imitating the human frame with surprising accuracy; but to suppose that the power of foretelling future events was reposed in these master-pieces of art, would be to ascribe to their makers the faculties reserved by the Deity for Himself, when He says, "It is I who kill and make alive." During his latter days, the Emperor was greatly afflicted with the gout, the nature of which has exercised the wit of many persons of science as well as of Anna Comnena. The poor patient was so much exhausted, that when the Empress was talking of most eloquent persons who should assist in the composition of his history, he said, with a natural contempt of such vanities, "The passages of my unhappy life call rather for tears and lamentation than for the praises you speak of."

A species of asthma having come to the assistance of the gout, the remedies of the physicians became as vain as the intercession of the monks and clergy, as well as the alms which were indiscriminately lavished. Two or three deep successive swoons gave ominous warning of the approaching blow; and at length was terminated the reign and

life of Alexius Comnenus, a prince who, with all the faults which may be imputed to him, still possesses a real right, from the purity of his general intentions, to be accounted one of the best sovereigns of the Lower Empire.

For some time, the historian forgot her pride of literary rank, and, like an ordinary person, burst into tears and shrieks, tore her hair, and defaced her countenance, while the Empress Irene cast from her her princely habits, cut off her hair, changed her purple buskins for black mourning shoes, and her daughter Mary, who had herself been a widow,

The Death of Alexius Comnenus.

took a black robe from one of her own wardrobes, and presented it to her mother. "Even in the moment when she put it on," says Anna Comnena, "the Emperor gave up the ghost, and in that moment the sun of my life set."

We shall not pursue her lamentations farther. She upbraids herself that, after the death of her father, that light of the world, she had also survived Irene, the delight alike of the east and of the west, and survived her husband also. "I am indignant," she said, "that my soul, suffering under such torrents of misfortune, should still deign to animate my body. Have I not," said she. "been more hard and unfeeling than the rocks themselves; and is it not just that one, who

could survive such a father and mother, and such a husband, should be subjected to the influence of so much calamity? But let me finish this history, rather than any longer fatigue my readers with my unavailing and tragical lamentation."

Having thus concluded her history, she adds the following two lines:—

> "The learned Comnena lays her pen aside,
> What time her subject and her father died."*

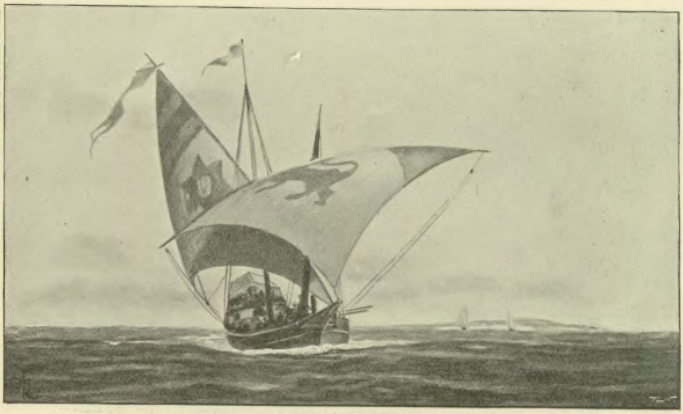
These quotations will probably give the readers as much as they wish to know of the real character of this imperial historian. Fewer words will suffice to dispose of the other parties who have been selected from her pages, as persons in the foregoing drama.

There is very little doubt that the Count Robert of Paris, whose audacity in seating himself upon the throne of the Emperor gives a peculiar interest to his character, was in fact a person of the highest rank; being no other, as has been conjectured by the learned Du Cange, than an ancestor of the house of Bourbon, which has so long given Kings to France. He was a successor, it has been conceived, of the Counts of Paris, by whom the city was valiantly defended against the Normans, and an ancestor of Hugh Capet. There are several hypotheses upon this subject, deriving the well-known Hugh Capet, first from the family of Saxony; secondly, from St. Arnoul, afterwards Bishop of Altex; third, from Nibilong; fourth, from the Duke of Bavaria; and, fifth, from a natural son of the Emperor Charlemagne. Variously placed, but in each of these contested pedigrees, appears this Robert, surnamed the *Strong*, who was Count of that district, of which Paris was the capital, most peculiarly styled the County, or Isle of France. Anna Comnena, who has recorded the bold usurpation of the Emperor's seat by this haughty chieftain, has also acquainted us with his receiving a severe, if not a mortal wound, at the Battle of Dorylæum, owing to his neglecting the warlike instructions with which her father had favoured him on the subject of the Turkish wars. The antiquary who is disposed to investigate this subject may consult the late Lord Ashburnham's elaborate Genealogy of the Royal House of France; also a note of Du Cange's on the Princess's history, p. 362, arguing for the identity of her "Robert of Paris, a haughty barbarian," with the "Robert called the Strong," mentioned as an ancestor of Hugh Capet. Gibbon, Vol. XI., p. 52, may also be consulted. The French antiquary and the English historian seem alike disposed to find the church, called in the

[* Ληξεν ὁπου βιοτοιο Αλεξιος ὁ Κομνηνος
Ενθα καλη Θυγατηρ ληξεν Αλεξιαδος.]

tale that of the Lady of the Broken Lances, in that dedicated to St. Drusas, or Drosin of Soissons, who was supposed to have peculiar influence on the issue of combats, and to be in the habit of determining them in favour of such champions as spent the night preceding at his shrine.

In consideration of the sex of one of the parties concerned, the author has selected our Lady of the Broken Lances as a more appropriate patroness than St. Drusas himself, for the Amazons, who were not uncommon in that age. Gaita, for example, the wife of Robert Guiscard, a redoubted hero, and the parent of a most heroic race of sons, was herself an Amazon, fought in the foremost ranks of the Normans, and is repeatedly commemorated by our imperial historian, Anna Comnena.



"A light galley, procured at a high rate, conducted them safely to Venice" (p. 386).

The reader can easily conceive to himself that Robert of Paris distinguished himself among his brethren-at-arms and fellow-crusaders. His fame resounded from the walls of Antioch; but, at the battle of Dorylæum, he was so desperately wounded as to be disabled from taking a part in the grandest scene of the expedition. His heroic Countess, however, enjoyed the great satisfaction of mounting the walls of Jerusalem, and in so far discharging her own vows and those of her husband. This was the more fortunate, as the sentence of the physicians pronounced that the wounds of the Count had been inflicted by a poisoned weapon, and that complete recovery was only to be hoped for by having recourse to his native air. After some time spent in the vain hope of averting by patience this unpleasant alternative, Count Robert subjected himself to necessity, or what was represented as such, and, with his wife and the

faithful Hereward, and all others of his followers who had been like himself disabled from combat, took the way to Europe by sea.

A light galley, procured at a high rate, conducted them safely to Venice, and from that then glorious city, the moderate portion of spoil which had fallen to the Count's share among the conquerors of Palestine, served to convey them to his own dominions, which, more fortunate than those of most of his fellow pilgrims, had been left uninjured by their

"Less than a twelvemonth was required to restore the Count of Paris to his full health.

neighbours during the time of their proprietor's absence on the crusade. The report that the Count had lost his health, and the power of continuing his homage to the Lady of the Broken Lances, brought upon him the hostilities of one or two ambitious or envious neighbours, whose covetousness was, however, sufficiently repressed by the brave resistance of the Countess and the resolute Hereward. Less than a twelvemonth was required to restore the Count of Paris to his full health, and to render him, as formerly, the assured protector of his own vassals, and the subject in whom the possessors of the French throne reposed the

utmost confidence. This latter capacity enabled Count Robert to discharge his debt towards Hereward in a manner as ample as he could have hoped or expected. Being now respected alike for his wisdom and his sagacity, as much as he always was for his intrepidity and his character as a successful crusader, he was repeatedly employed by the Court of France in settling the troublesome and intricate affairs in which the Norman possessions of the English crown involved the rival nations. William Rufus was not insensible to his merit, nor blind to the importance of gaining his good-will; and finding out his anxiety that Hereward should be restored to the land of his fathers, he took, or made an opportunity, by the forfeiture of some rebellious noble, of conferring upon our Varangian a large district adjacent to the New Forest, being part of the scenes which his father chiefly frequented, and where it is said the descendants of the valiant squire and his Bertha have subsisted for many a long year, surviving turns of time and chance, which are in general fatal to the continuance of more distinguished families.

NOTES.

Note I., p. 8.—Constantinople.

The impression which the imperial city was calculated to make on such visitors as the Crusaders of the West, is given by the ancient French chronicler Villehardouin, who was present at the capture of A.D. 1203. "When we had come," he says, "within three leagues, to a certain Abbey, then we could plainly survey Constantinople. There the ships and the galleys came to anchor; and much did they who had never been in that quarter before, gaze upon the city. That such a city could be in the world they had never conceived, and they were never weary of staring at the high walls and towers with which it was entirely encompassed, the rich palaces and lofty churches, of which there were so many that no one could have believed it, if he had not seen with his own eyes that city, the Queen of all cities. And know that there was not so bold a heart there that it did not feel some terror at the strength of Constantinople."—Chap. lxvi.

Again,—"And now many of those of the host went to see Constantinople within, and the rich palaces and stately churches of which it possesses so many, and the riches of the place, which are such as no other city ever equalled. I need not speak of the sanctuaries, which are as many as are in all the world beside."—Chap. c.

Note II., p. 12.—Varangians.

Villehardouin, in describing the siege of Constantinople, A.D. 1203, says "Li murs fu mult garnis d'Anglois et de Danois,"—hence the dissertation of Ducange here quoted, and several articles besides in his Glossarium as *Varangi*, Warengangi, etc. The etymology of the name is left uncertain, though the German *fort-ganger*, *i.e.*, forth-goer, wanderer, *exile*, seems the most probable. The term occurs in various Italian and Sicilian documents, anterior to the establishment of the Varangian Guards at Constantinople and collected by Muratori: as, for instance, in an edict of one of the Lombard kings, "Omnes Warengangi, qui de exteris finibus in regni nostri finibus advenerint, seque sub scuto potestatis nostræ subdiderint, legibus nostris Longobardorum vivere debeant,"—and in another, "De Warengangis, nobilibus, mediocribus, et rusticis hominibus, qui usque nunc in terrâ vestrâ fugiti sunt, habeatis eos."—*Muratori*, Vol. II. p. 261.

With regard to the origin of the Varangian Guard, the most distinct testimony is that of Ordericus Vitalis, who says, "When therefore the English had lost their liberty, they turned themselves with zeal to discover the means of throwing off the unaccustomed yoke. Some fled to Sueno, King of the Danes, to excite him to the recovery of the inheritance of his grandfather, Canute. Not a few

fled into exile in other regions, either from the mere desire of escaping from under the Norman rule, or in the hope of acquiring wealth, and so being one day in a condition to renew the struggle at home. Some of these, in the bloom of youth, penetrated into a far distant land and offered themselves to the military service of the Constantinopolitan Emperor—that wise prince, against whom Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia, had then raised all his forces. The English exiles were favourably received and opposed in battle to the Normans, for whose encounter the Greeks themselves were too weak. Alexius began to build a town for the English, a little above Constantinople, at a place called *Chevelot*, but the trouble of the Normans from Sicily still increasing, he soon recalled them to the capital, and entrusted the principal palace with all its treasures to their keeping. This was the method in which the Saxon English found their way to Ionia, where they still remain, highly valued by the Emperor and the people."—Book IV., p. 508.

Note III., p. 113.—Labarum.

Ducange fills half a column of his huge page with the mere names of the authors who have written at length on the *Labarum*, or principal standard of the empire for the time of Constantine. It consisted of a spear of silver, or plated with that metal, having suspended from a cross beam below the spoke a small square silken banner, adorned with portraits of the reigning family, and over these the famous Monogram which expresses at once the figure of the cross and the initial letters of the name of Christ. The bearer of the *Labarum* was an officer of high rank down to the last days of the Byzantine government.—See Gibbon, chap. xx.

Ducange seems to have proved, from the evidence of coins and triumphal monuments, that a standard of the form of the *Labarum* was used by various barbarous nations long before it was adopted by their Roman conquerors, and he is of opinion that its name also was borrowed from either Teutonic Germany, or Celtic Gaul, or Sclavonic Illyria. It is certain that either the German language or the Welsh may afford at this day a perfectly satisfactory etymon: *Lap-heer* in the former, and *Lab-hair* in the latter, having precisely the same meaning—*the cloth of the host.*

The form of the *Labarum* may still be recognised in the banners carried in ecclesiastical processions in all Roman Catholic countries.

Note IV., p. 123.—Gaita.

This Amazon makes a conspicuous figure in Anna Comnena's account of her father's campaigns against Robert Guiscard. On one occasion ("Alexiad," Lib. IV., p. 93) she represents her as thus recalling the fugitive soldiery of her husband to their duty,—*Ἡ δε γε Γαιτα Παλλας ἀλλη, κἂν μη Αθηνη, κατ᾽ αυτων μεγιστην ἀφεισα φωνην, μονον οὐ το Ὁμηρικον επος τῃ ἰδιᾳ διαλεκτῳ λεγειν ἑωκει. Μεχρι ποσου φευξεσθε; στητε, ἀνερες ἐστε. Ὡς δε ἐτι φευγοντας τουτους ἑωρα, δορυ μακρον ἐναγκαλισαμενη, ὁλους ρυτηρας ἐνδουσα κατα των φευγοντων ἴεται.*—That is, exhorting them, in all but Homeric language, at the top of her voice; and when this failed, brandishing a long spear, and rushing upon the fugitives at the utmost speed of her horse.

This heroic lady, according to the *Chronique Scandaleuse* of those days, was afterwards deluded by some cunning overtures of the Greek Emperor, and poisoned her husband in expectation of gaining a place on the throne of Constantinople. Ducange, however, rejects the story, and so does Gibbon.